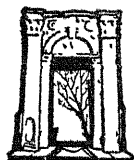


# THE PROGRESS OF A BIOGRAPHER

*by*

HUGH KINGSMILL



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HUGH KINGSMILL





## CONTENTS

	PAGE
1. THE PROGRESS OF A BIOGRAPHER	1
2. WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY	15
3. RUDYARD KIPLING	27
4. J. M. BARRIE	38
5. BERNARD SHAW	45
6. SHAW AND DICKENS	50
7. THE INTELLIGENT MAN'S GUIDE TO OSCAR WILDE	54
8. OSCAR WILDE'S BIOGRAPHERS	62
9. RUPERT BROOKE	66
10. OCCLUDED PASTURES	70
11. PENDRAGONSHIP	74
12. TENNYSON AND W. H. AUDEN	78
13. ALDOUS HUXLEY'S MYSTIC	83
14. THE 'WHO' AND THE 'WHAT'	87
15. MEETINGS WITH W. B. YEATS	91
16. THE LETTERS OF RAINER MARIA RILKE	95
17. <i>A WOMAN OF THE PHARISEES</i>	99
18. GEORGE SAINTSBURY	103
19. SIR WALTER SCOTT AND JOHN BUCHAN	108
20. LOGAN PEARSALL SMITH	112
21. HIGH LIFE IN VICTORIAN FICTION	116
22. THE ENGLISH IN SWITZERLAND	121
23. HUMOUR	126
24. WILLIAM GERHARDI	130
25. MAX BEERBOHM	135
26. P. G. WODEHOUSE	139
27. BOSWELL AND D. B. WYNDHAM LEWIS	143
28. COUNSELS FOR THE DEFENCE	147

	PAGE
29. HAMLET BORGIANIZED	152
30. BIOGRAPHY AND CRITICISM	157
31. THE HEROIC VITALISTS	161
32. THE COMFORTS OF RICHARD WAGNER	165
33. WHAT ARE POLITICS?	170
34. NAPOLEON	174
35. LLOYD GEORGE	177
36. WINSTON CHURCHILL	183
37. KARL MARX	187
38. THE COMMON MAN	191

## I

### THE PROGRESS OF A BIOGRAPHER

#### I

WHEN I was a small boy I expected and desired the marvellous and the mythological in the stories I read—wrong heroically righted; evil, long triumphant, suddenly brought low—and in Scott and Kingsley and innumerable romances of school life I found what I wanted. But the complementary desire for the likely, the actual, must also have been there, though latent, for two moments of surprise and relief have remained vivid in my memory: the first, in a school story by Ascot R. Hope, when two friends, after making up a quarrel, feel a certain cooling down and embarrassment, and are glad of an excuse to separate for an hour or two; the second, at the close of Kingsley's *Westward Ho!*, when Amyas Leigh, the superb hero, blinded in his last fight, comes home, and one day, stooping down to pick up something he has dropped, knocks his head on the corner of the table and bursts into tears. During my teens my growing desire for verisimilitude found some nourishment in Thackeray, but it was not until, at the age of nineteen, I read Goethe's *Faust* that I experienced anything so immediate and vivid as the shocks I had received from Ascot R. Hope and Kingsley—in the prison scene when Gretchen's horror at her approaching execution overpowers her remorse for the deaths of her mother and her baby, and even her rapture at being in Faust's arms again. In retrospect this piece of reality sticks up like a rock out of the vast ocean of print which I traversed in those years.

At eighteen I went to Oxford which, as the most famous seat of culture in the world, I pictured otherwise than it turned out to be. Had I been asked to define what I meant by culture, I should have been at a loss; but I thought of it indistinctly as the key to a poetic impassioned enjoyment of life, and of dons as the guardians of the key, lay priests dedicated to the task of interpreting the poets and clarifying the philosophers, and only less glorious than the men they served. It did not take me long to discover my error—about as long as it would take a man who went into a hen-house looking for

birds of paradise. There are dons who care for the intellect and the imagination, and there are priests who care for the spirit; but broadly speaking the function of universities and churches alike is to trim and tame enthusiasm, to suppress curiosity, and, in short, to whittle immortal souls into serviceable props of the established order.

In 1910, when I had been two years at Oxford, Frank Harris published *The Man Shakespeare*. By this time I realized clearly enough that literature to dons was not a revelation of reality but a refuge from it, a zariba of books behind which they took their dubious ease while life growled and roared outside. And now this voice bellowing that literature was the reflection of experience, hurling abuse at the professors who had Victorianized Shakespeare into a model citizen, and proclaiming One Woman (passion), and a thousand women (sensuality), as the artist's way to achievement and renown. At the time I did not see that Harris's character and experience, faithfully reflected in his book, coincided far too little with Shakespeare's to make him a reliable interpreter. I was enchanted, intoxicated by his substitution of a wild, passionate, tragic Shakespeare for the smug waxwork bard of the Victorians. His praise of sensuality, special pleading in one who had long since lost his illusions, sounded melodiously in the ear of youth, and I hastened to sit at the feet of a master whose message agreed so well with what I desired from life.

From the late summer of 1911 to the early spring of 1913 I was intimately associated with Harris, first as a disciple and then as an assistant on a blameless ladies' journal which did not long survive the ordeal of being edited by Harris. During this period he was publishing his first series of Contemporary Portraits, and as I read them my hero-worship for him as a David sallying forth against the Goliath of Victorian humbug began to be qualified by doubts. I could find no centre in his work, whether in his portraits of Carlyle and Renan, of Burton, Whistler, and John Davidson, or in his biography of Oscar Wilde, then in manuscript, or in his novel celebrating the Chicago anarchists. If the poet was the greatest of the sons of men, why this glorification of bomb-throwing anarchists? If there was 'infinite virtue' in the 'frail, sensual singer', Shakespeare, how came it that Puritanism had tempered character as iron is tempered in the furnace? If science was the key to the future, why take Renan to task for disbelieving in

miracles? If millionaires embodied the triumph of mindless greed, were mere mouths and alimentary canals, why this praise of the wisdom acquired by rubbing shoulders in the market-place? My veneration for Harris became confused. I felt as the children of Israel might have felt had Moses sat on a revolving Pisgah, hailing each new horizon as the Promised Land.

I began also to realize that he was not deeply interested in anyone but himself, and that in writing of Shakespeare, Carlyle, and the rest, he was concerned chiefly with measuring himself against the great, to their disadvantage, and in a lesser degree with amassing credit for the wide range of his sympathy and understanding. Yet, after all the deductions which time and reflection have forced me to make from my original enthusiasm for Harris, there remains something which I could not find in my accredited teachers or in the famous oracles of my youth, Shaw and Wells, Kipling and Chesterton. Ultimately, Harris was occupied with the individual, and the others were occupied with the group. Two great movements were gathering speed in the first years of this century, the one towards collectivism as a refuge from the isolation in which the current theory of a mechanical universe had engulfed the individual; the other, the English voice of which, D. H. Lawrence, was just beginning to be heard, down to the depths of human consciousness, to an enfolding darkness which was at least more comforting than the bleak surface of a world deprived of any goal or god. Without knowing it, for I had not even heard the names of Marx and Freud, which represented the extreme forms of these opposing tendencies, I was in search of a mean between them. I did not want to lose my identity either in the darkness from which I had emerged or in the forced and premature unification with other identities imposed by all institutions, whether anti-religious or professedly religious. Freud was disintegrating the individual; Marx was obliterating the individual; Harris was asserting the individual, dubiously enough for the most part, but sometimes, in such a sentence as 'The soul is content only with ecstasy', on a level above and beyond his more famous and reputable contemporaries.

The war of 1914-18 immensely quickened the two movements, towards collectivism and down to the origins of human consciousness. The first of these movements, encouraged by

the success of the Russian Revolution, produced and is still producing curious attempts at poetry, fiction, biography, and literary criticism, written in conformity with what their authors believe would have been the wishes of Karl Marx. One example of these products should be sufficient—a life of Dickens based on the view that he was an embryonic Marxist, hampered in his progress towards the light by a wife of irreclaimably bourgeois mentality, with whom at a certain stage in his development he could no longer bear to live. Very different in its significance for literature has been the complementary and opposite movement, the descent or retreat into the individual consciousness, a movement which, in its beneficial aspect, has greatly stimulated the sensibility of the individual. But the men of genius who represent this movement, Proust and D. H. Lawrence, Joyce and T. S. Eliot, Kafka and Rilke, have all, in varying degrees, sacrificed breadth and height to depth—sympathy and ecstasy to the progressively gloomier task of sinking shafts into their interiors; and so eventually, as all these dimensions are interdependent, have also sacrificed depth. The individual in their writings loses himself in himself, enlarging himself into nothingness, as though the processes of creation were reversing themselves and the breath expiring from Adam which God breathed into him that he might become a living soul.

Such, then, was the spiritual climate which was forming round me in 1918 when I began to write, a climate to which many have succumbed in the intervening years but which may in a longer retrospect than anyone now living can enjoy be seen to have had its bracing qualities; for no age, in spite of academic fancies to the contrary, is in itself propitious to a writer, and the harsher it seems the more salutary it may prove.

My first book was a novel, written in captivity and reflecting a mood of general disillusionment, such as is common in the late twenties. This mood was no doubt intensified by the unnatural life of a prisoner-of-war, but owed very little to my feelings about the war; for my illusions have been about individuals, not about mass movements, and, since at its outbreak I did not expect the war to further my felicity, I felt no bitterness against it as it drew to its tired close. Harris had been my chief, or, at any rate, my most easily realizable disenchantment, and accordingly was the theme of my novel.

While I was writing it, Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians*

reached our camp, in the spring of 1918. Its merits were as obvious then as its limitations have since become. Strachey, a conscientious objector during the war, valued life as a spectacle but was repelled by it as an experience. Human beings were interesting to watch, but what they did had no ulterior significance; purposes, aims, and ideals being the more or less conscious disguises adopted by the egotism of the individual, the sole reality, in the pursuit of its own satisfaction. This was Strachey's philosophy, and his embodiment of it in his brilliant sketches of Cardinal Manning, Florence Nightingale, Dr. Arnold, and General Gordon, accorded perfectly with the revulsion created by the war against the popular mythology of Victorian England. Every age has its pantheon of idols who embody the dominant mood. During the Commonwealth, England was ruled by saints, who with the Restoration were suddenly seen to be blasphemous hypocrites and parricides. After the surfeit of godliness, merriment was in demand, and so the reigning king, a saturnine and disillusioned man, had to be the Merry Monarch. In Victorian England, with its fabulous increase in population and wealth, the prevailing mood was a mixture of complacency and fear. The surface was so prosperous that the dread of what lay beneath developed into an obsession which produced the extraordinary taboos that paralysed the literature of that age. Victorian biographers had to portray their subjects as entirely disinterested, and any biographer who was sufficiently disinterested not to conform with this ruling suffered accordingly; Froude's attempt to tell a portion of the truth about Carlyle exposing him to general execration, and Anthony Trollope's disclosure that he wrote so many words an hour, and liked to be well paid for them, killing his sales with a public who wanted to believe that authors composed in a delirium of inspiration and were utterly indifferent to the financial results, if any, of their labour.

Lytton Strachey's purpose in *Eminent Victorians* was to find behind the myth what he believed to be the man: in Manning the self-seeking opportunist behind the austere ecclesiastic; in Dr. Arnold the pompous bigot behind the earnest pastor of youth; in Florence Nightingale the ruthless zealot of action behind the compassionate healer; in Gordon the brandy-inspired fanatic behind the soldier of God. In correcting, as he so effectively did, one kind of falsity, Strachey

fell into another. His model for *Eminent Victorians*, he once told Hesketh Pearson, was Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*; and he appears to have supposed that his view of biography coincided with Johnson's as expressed in *The Rambler*: 'There are many who think it an act of piety to hide the faults and failings of their friends, even when they can no longer suffer by their detection, we therefore see whole ranks of characters adorned with uniform panegyric, and not to be known from one another but by extrinsic and casual circumstances. . . . If we owe regard to the dead, there is yet more respect to be paid to knowledge, to virtue, and to truth.'

The severity with which Johnson treated some of his subjects, particularly Milton and Swift, Gray and Lyttelton, raised against him what Boswell calls a 'feeble, though shrill outcry'. He was accused of bigotry, lack of feeling, envy, and all the other defects imputed to anyone who tries to discriminate between what is sound and what is false in an established reputation. It would be incorrect to say that there was no ground for this outcry. Occasionally, as in some passages in the life of Swift, Johnson's prejudices got the better of him; yet even with Swift the effort to be just is perceptible. There is throughout the book a mixture of severity and sympathy which reflects the combination in Johnson of a belief in absolute virtue and an equally strong realization of how far short of it even the best of human beings fall. Whether or not he had it consciously in mind, he was directed in everything he wrote by the saying of Jesus: 'None is good, save one, that is God.' Strachey, on the other hand, an epicurean sceptic who remarks in one of his essays that the religious motive has quietly dropped out of the modern world, wrote from the standpoint that no one at all is good, and that man's only rational occupation is to observe from a distance the contention of conflicting egotisms. To Strachey all mythologies were equally absurd, whether they embodied the transient illusions of a particular epoch or welled up out of the depths of the soul to illumine the mystery of life. Looking at men from the outside, he interpreted their actions rationally, like Swift in *Gulliver's Travels*, and therefore found no reason in them. To Johnson popular mythology was a distortion of the Christian mythology, which contained for him the sole revelation of ultimate reality; it was an attempt to attribute perfection to imperfect beings, and so a means to retarding man's



progress towards the divine. The difference in attitude between Johnson and Strachey was therefore fundamental, for Johnson felt with his whole being that life cannot be interpreted as a self-contained experience and that the relation of the individual to God underlies and conditions his relation to man. To mark a man's faults and failings was, for Johnson, to indicate where he had diverged from his true relation to God; for Strachey it was an agreeable intellectual pastime, which flattered his sense of superiority both to his subject and to the illusion-ridden mob.

As the spasm of disgust with the age which had collapsed in the war of 1914-18 died away, Strachey's mood became milder, and in his next book, *Queen Victoria*, he inaugurated a new view of Victorianism, which being no less mythical than the one it superseded took root quickly and is still flourishing—a whimsical, teasing, half-admiring, half-mocking view that found in Queen Victoria a quaintly impressive symbol of a quaintly impressive age. This amendment in Strachey was, I remember, very welcome to the dons, the bishops, the literate politicians and other guardians of popular mythology, a great sigh of relief going up from them as the news went round that Strachey had fallen in love with Queen Victoria. Yet, whatever may be thought of his later work, no one who read *Eminent Victorians* on its appearance was able, even if he disliked it, to ignore the change of attitude which it initiated. I remember very vividly my first sight of it. Alec Waugh, who was a fellow-prisoner at Mainz, was walking across the barrack square with some books he had just received from England. He paused to show me them, and the title *Eminent Victorians* caught my eye. 'I must examine this old bore,' I said, and made off with the book. That I assumed the title was unironic illuminates the state into which biography had fallen: and the immediate impression the brevity, coherence, and verisimilitude of the book made on me suggests the indebtedness to Lytton Strachey of everyone who has written biography within the last thirty years.

## II

In the middle of 1927, after eight years in a family business, I found myself obliged to write for a living. Up to that time my net profit on my books (two novels and a volume of short stories) was slightly under three pounds, but they had been

well reviewed, and my literary agent told me that he could get me an advance both in England and the States on a biography of Matthew Arnold. So I felt there was nothing for it except to include fiction, for the time being, among the things, persons and places from which I was parting, and to try my hand at a form of writing by which, as it approached reality through the individual, I had always been attracted.

It was unlucky for me, so far as the repairing of my fortunes was concerned, that Arnold should have come my way at a moment when I was not in a mood to do full justice to the qualities which make for an ordered life on an assured income. My affection for his sincere and melancholy verse had deepened with the years, but such liking as I had once had for him as a literary critic was now much diminished, and I did not care for him at all in his character of general adviser in politics, ethics, and religion, finding the professorial urbanity with which he condescended to mankind much less brotherly than Swift's frank view of his fellow-creatures as a pack of Yahoos. Treating Arnold as half a don and half a genius, I belaboured the don with a zeal which diverted most of my reviewers from noticing the tributes I paid to the poet. My book (a detail I had not foreseen) was in most instances sent for review to critics of an academic turn of mind, critics who could not be expected to enjoy seeing Arnold harried because he adored Oxford, preferred the interests of society to those of the individual, revered authority, especially as incarnated in his father Dr. Arnold, sacrificed the deepest feeling of his life, for the French girl Marguerite, to his respect for Victorian conventions, and thereafter dwindled into a mildly Utopian collectivist. Here and there a reviewer was favourable; and I remember with particular gratitude one who said that the book, though written from a damaging standpoint, was essentially sympathetic to Arnold. But these few approving notes were drowned in a chorus of disgust and indignation. High-pitched voices asked how it was possible that any reputable publisher could have brought himself to, etc. The fatal influence of Strachey on persons with none of his breeding and intelligence was lamented. If this was indeed what the modern age wanted, then farewell to culture as it had hitherto been understood, and so on. There was, I now see, a good deal of excuse for all this agitation. To begin with, the book was written in an informal style at the other pole of expression

from the grave and measured prose, relieved now and then by a touch of mellow humour, which my critics deemed appropriate to the subject; and (the book's chief defect) it was, with very little disguise, a personal manifesto which aimed at vindicating the author's practice and principles by showing how disastrous for Arnold different principles and an opposite practice had proved. It required, I recognize, much forbearance and insight to divine the theme which underlay this ruffled surface; but the critic I have mentioned found it, in a passage about Arnold's break with Marguerite. My view was that Arnold wanted to marry Marguerite but, realizing that his family would consider her unsuitable, sacrificed his love to ostensibly moral though intrinsically worldly considerations; and I suggested the effect of this sacrifice in the passage quoted by my reviewer: 'The reward of renunciation is some good greater than the thing renounced. To renounce with no vision of such good, from fear or in automatic obedience to some formula, is to weaken the springs of life, and to diminish the soul's resistance to this world.'

It was the importance I attributed to Marguerite in Arnold's life which most exasperated the critics. The attitude to a new view of the professional or academic critic—of the critic, that is, who has no new views—always goes through the same phases; and I was now to experience in my own case what I had already observed in many others. First came the phase of astonished contempt, during which I was attacked for my utterly unwarrantable assumption that a man's life and his work are interrelated—an assumption which has been made by Milton and Wordsworth, by Tolstoi and Dickens, and in short by every imaginative writer who has expressed an opinion on the matter, but which continues to be stigmatized as unimaginative by the academic critic, for whom the imaginative faculty appears to be a kind of conjuring trick, blessedly unrelated to human experience. Where, I was asked, was my evidence that Marguerite had ever existed? What was my authority for converting the gracious creation of a poet's fancy into a disreputable Frenchwoman, clandestinely enjoyed by the renegade son of an upright father? I give my general impression of these recriminations, but that I have not exaggerated their vehemence may be judged from a thunderbolt launched at me by Mr. Charles Harvey, M.A. The Arnold storm had long died down, other storms had blown up, and I

was wandering one day round a public library in a desultory mood when I noticed a recently published biography of Matthew Arnold, and opening it in the hope rather than the expectation of coming upon some cordial reference to myself read: 'Incredible as it may seem, Mr. Kingsmill suggested that there was an episode of disgrace, that Arnold at Thun, in Switzerland, met a French girl, a governess-companion, living in apartments, of a lower social order than himself, and fell passionately in love with her. Arnold is said to have seen her again in the second year, and then to have parted from her finally. These suggestions are not supported by a single scrap of definite evidence.'

More years passed, and one day there appeared a volume containing Matthew Arnold's letters to Arthur Clough, among them a letter in which Arnold mentioned that he was going to Thun for the sake of a pair of blue eyes there. I was interested to see what adjustment in the orthodox attitude to Arnold this would necessitate and in due course a letter from a grandson of Matthew Arnold appeared in an important Sunday paper. He took, I thought, the best line open to him in the circumstances, and indeed grasped the nettle with a firmness which his grandfather might well have envied. No longer execrated as a satyr, I was now treated with light irony as an old-fashioned precisian who, disallowing the prescriptive right of a youthful poet to sport with Amaryllis in the shade, had made a rather absurd fuss over Arnold not marrying an early flame.

Steadied by the reception of *Matthew Arnold*, I resumed my career as a biographer in a more sober and impersonal mood. *Arnold* appeared in 1928, and in the course of the next fifteen years I wrote thirteen studies, some short, some full-length, of a number of famous persons, including Dickens, Johnson, Oliver Cromwell, and Casanova.

These four otherwise very dissimilar persons all illustrate in a high degree the way in which remarkable men are simplified into myths by popular fancy acting through suggestible minds. To take the least of these figures first, Casanova by the beginning of this century was transformed into a kind of changeling who flitted through life tasting all its pleasures and exempt from all its pains. Earnest Casanova scholars pondered his quick-fire love affairs as though in the presence of some profound illumination of the human heart, lingering over the great love of his life, as they called the amusing and

extremely businesslike Henrietta, in pensive wonder why no trace had ever been found of the letters, breathing undying devotion, which Casanova claimed to have received from her in his old age. It took Havelock Ellis about twenty years to come to the conclusion that a man who has never done anything except for his own gratification will not, when he sits down to his memoirs in his desolate old age, be inspired with a passionate desire to paint a truthful self-portrait; and even after reaching this conclusion, Havelock Ellis still clung to the notion that Casanova was a free spirit, a wit and bold thinker, capable of disputing on equal terms with Voltaire.

More tangled, and with much deeper roots, was the Cromwell myth, which under the tendance of Macaulay and Carlyle satisfied the Victorian craving to feel and appear religious while pursuing purely worldly aims. In spite of a Catholic counter-movement, under the erratic direction of Hilaire Belloc, the myth has flourished and even expanded of late years, John Buchan in the Fascist-Nazi nineteen-thirties calling Cromwell the greatest of Englishmen, and Professor G. M. Trevelyan proclaiming from the cloisters of Trinity, Cambridge, that Cromwell has shown 'to what height the plant man can sometimes grow'. I have found in examining myths that they are invariably based on acts and sayings taken out of the circumstances which produced them. 'That which you have by force I look upon as nothing' is an enlightened sentiment, often quoted by Cromwell's apologists. In their context these words formed part of an appeal addressed by Cromwell to the army extremists who, after the conclusion of the first civil war, made menacing demands for more extensive social reforms than Cromwell wished to concede. Nothing about the futility of force fell from Cromwell's lips as he hacked his way through the breach at Drogheda or as the Scots began to break at Dunbar or while the musketeers were filing in to turn out the Rump or when Charles I laid his head upon the block. Equally illuminating is the context in which Cromwell pleaded with Parliament to remember the poor: 'Relieve the oppressed, hear the groans of poor prisoners in England; be pleased to reform the abuses of all professions; and if there be anyone that makes many poor to make a few rich, that suits not a Commonwealth.' Having placated the Levellers with this outburst, Cromwell allowed them enough rope to hang themselves, after which he expressed his hearty approval of

'the Ranks and Orders of men, whereby England hath been known for hundreds of years', and dismissed the social philosophy of the Levellers as 'a pleasing voice to all Poor Men, and truly not unwelcome to all Bad Men'. What I looked for in following Cromwell through his rise from obscurity to supreme power was not altruistic sentiments but disinterested actions, not echoes from the Bible but evidence of a single step in the whole course of his career taken against his own interests. I discovered no such evidence, but neither did I receive the impression, which the Belloc school claimed to have received, of a stupid, paltry creature floundering out of his depths. In Cromwell I found on a great scale what Casanova had illustrated on a small, that life cannot be outwitted and that defiance of its laws brings penalties proportioned to the stature of the offender—rage and bitterness to Casanova, remorse and terror to Cromwell.

The Cromwell and Casanova myths were bubbles blown by unsatisfied desires for power and pleasure. Where there is true greatness, the myth must partake of the reality out of which it grows, yet none the less requires from time to time to have the accretions of popular sentiment and prejudice removed. In the life of Johnson which I wrote during 1933, I diverged a good deal from the conception of him current at that date. From Macaulay, who treated him as a kind of magnified John Bull bursting with antiquated prejudices, to Bernard Shaw, who affirmed that he was a creation of Boswell's, the emphasis had increasingly been laid on Johnson as he appeared to the world, a tremendous character, a sledgehammer talker whose good heart came into play only as he surveyed the prostrate corpses of his table companions. That was certainly an aspect, and no negligible one, of Johnson; but from his prayers and meditations, from certain passages in his letters and verse, from *Rasselas* and Mrs. Thrale's portrait, less amusing but more intimate than Boswell's, I received an impression of an essentially imaginative nature clogged by melancholia, a profound thinker limited by inborn and irrational fears, and an intensely loving and compassionate soul hampered in its expression by lifelong disabilities of mind and body. This view of Johnson was well received both in England and the States, and, I infer from later studies, has helped to modify the old John Bull conception and also to adjust the balance between Boswell and Mrs. Thrale, whose

place in Johnson's life and contribution to our understanding of him are now no longer underrated. As late as the early nineteen-thirties it was still customary to treat her with disgusted contempt. I remember that while I was at work on my book *Lord Lansdowne*, assisted by Dr. R. W. Chapman, the chief Johnsonian authority at Oxford, brought out some letters of Mrs. Thrale's daughter, Queeney, and in the introduction called Mrs. Thrale 'intolerable as a parent and rightly kept at a distance by her offspring'—a full-throated echo of Macaulay's one-hundred-year-old denunciation of Mrs. Thrale for making an unusually happy second marriage.

After Johnson, I wrote a study of Charles Dickens which very effectively deprived me of such goodwill as Johnson had won for me. I was, I learnt with pained surprise from my reviews, a peerer through keyholes, a Freudian dabbling in garbage, a grave-desecrating ghoul, and many other things all equally revolting; my crime, I soon discovered, being that I had criticized G. K. Chesterton's formulation of the Dickens myth as it had evolved among the cultured in the thirty to forty years after Dickens's death. During his lifetime Dickens was considered vulgar, the educated classes preferring Thackeray; but by the close of the century, as I realized after reading a few of my press-cuttings, he had become a great favourite with the refined and the sophisticated who, feeling democracy in the air, sought to appease the spirit of the age by shuddering over Dostoevsky and wistfully smiling over Dickens, while the muffins kept warm within the fender. According to Chesterton, the spokesman of the new attitude, Dickens was a great-hearted lover of his kind, a laughing democrat blowing away all pretensions, social or intellectual, in the hurricane of his mirth. For me, on the other hand, his fascination lay in the immense gulf between his sentiments and his practice, in the fantastic, almost unbelievable extent to which he was not what Chesterton painted him.

Dickens's affair with Ellen Ternan, the details of which appeared shortly after I began my book, did not take up much space in my narrative, or seem to me of essential importance; for Dickens to me was a child who never grew up, with the genius of a child and its intense egotism, natural and fruitful in the opening of life but corroding and destructive in later years. Ellen Ternan, however, like Arnold's Marguerite, provided an easy vent for moral indignation; and although

I had learnt of her existence from a daily paper with a sale of over two million copies, I was treated as though I had either fabricated her existence or dragged her into the shameless day from some dark vault in which the piety of Dickens's true friends had immured his one and only lapse from virtue. In the ten years or so since my book appeared, Ellen Ternan has been comfortably assimilated; and Dickens, I gather from a recent biography, has now been transformed into a gallicized Englishman, who lived for his art, held enlightened views on sexual relations, and was never quite happy away from Paris. In this form he is as popular as ever, for the human mind gravitates naturally towards one or other of two extremes, and is fretful only when it is arrested at an intermediate point.

A perfect biographer would abstract from his own experience the truths which illuminate the experience of his subject, while resisting the temptation either to identify himself with his subject and heighten his merits, or to distinguish himself from his subject and stress his defects. He would have, in short, the complete sympathy of complete detachment. Failing to attain this enviable state, a biographer will either be too indulgent or too severe, and it is better on the whole to be too indulgent. When my book on Johnson was nearly over, I dreamed that I was on the summit of a high mountain. From a deep chasm far below came the subdued roar of a torrent, but I felt no fear. The snow around me shone in the light of the sun, and I was filled with a sense of liberation. Towards the close of my book on Dickens I dreamed that I was on the slopes of a high range, a little below the crest. There were shifting patches of light on the snowfields near me, but I was conscious of the precipices beneath, and fear mingled with my relief. My love for Johnson made me, I think, a little too partial to him, though not to such an extent as to introduce a disturbing element into my dream. The egotism of Dickens aroused mine, I put too much energy into pursuing him from chapter to chapter, with no pause in which to renew my sympathy for him, and so, as my dream showed, I did not reach the crest.

To a biographer the chief value of any book of his is that when it has receded far enough into the distance it reveals the relation between himself and his subject, and so becomes a chart of his own faults by which he should be able to steer a smoother course when he sails on his next voyage.



## WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY

## I

MR. GORDON RAY'S four volumes,<sup>1</sup> two of which have now been issued, will form the first collected edition of Thackeray's correspondence. Three-fifths of the letters in this edition have never before been published, and of those which have many appeared in an incomplete state. Mr. Ray has carried through an extremely complex and laborious undertaking with a tenacity and thoroughness which even a scholar of equal calibre might, in an unguarded moment, hail as heroic, and which to the unscholarly must appear as almost superhuman.

The two volumes already published range from July 1817, when Thackeray was six, to the close of 1851, when he was working on *Henry Esmond* and had just broken with the Brookfields. In November 1817, Thackeray's mother married Captain Henry Carmichael-Smyth, her first love, from whom she had been separated by the intrigues of her match-making grandmother, had met again by chance in India, and married two years after the death of Thackeray's father. The youthful William was sent back to England some months before the marriage, and a few weeks after his arrival wrote to his mother, telling her that he liked Chiswick, thought St. James's Park a very fine place, and liked St. Paul's Church, too, very much. 'I hope Captain Smyth is well,' he ended; 'give my love to him and tell him he must bring you home to your affectionate little Son.' Already the external circumstances of his life mirrored the internal dislocation which marred whatever he was to attempt in the future. He had lost his father, he had exchanged the country of his birth but not of his blood for the country of his blood but not of his birth, and his mother had turned from him in the desire to retrieve the happiness which in the interlude of her first marriage she had resigned herself to having lost forever.

Carmichael-Smyth, Thackeray's model for Colonel Newcome, was a man of simple and steadfast character in whom the

<sup>1</sup> *The Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace Thackeray* Collected and edited by Gordon N. Ray. Vol. 1, 1817-1840; vol. 2, 1841-1851. 4 vols.

wife found the support which her earnest, intensely emotional nature needed. Her gain was her son's loss, and the attempt on both sides to make good this loss developed a close but unsatisfactory relationship between the mother and the son. On her side were religious principles and a sense of duty, on his a longing for her love, kept in check by the dread of her displeasure, his heart always prompting him to confide in her, his head warning him not to submit his beliefs and way of life to her severely evangelical judgment. This internal conflict is very apparent in his letters to her, a medley of facetiousness and piety, tenderness, resentment and remorse, priggishness and jets of unexpected and at times, from a son to an austere religious mother, disconcerting candour; the whole forming a perfect image of the writer's disconnected nature. Sometimes, and especially in his letters from Germany in his twentieth year, his genius comes through, though less in the writing than in the pen-and-ink sketches inserted in the text. These sketches occur intermittently throughout his correspondence. In his youth, particularly when he was writing to his mother or Edward FitzGerald from Germany and France, they have a strange charm in their slight elusive evocation of Rhine landscapes or bits of old French towns, peopled by quaint marionettes in postures of meditation, love, or combat; but as he grew older the marionettes stiffened into images of gloom or horror, bowed down by desolation or with eyes fixed in an unmoving glare.

In his letters from Germany he tried to persuade his mother that he was becoming regular in his habits and correct in his views. But the effect of assuring her that he would soon have mastered enough German for practical purposes, or of stigmatizing Goethe as a libertine while praising Schiller for his unexceptionable religion and morals, was lost when he lapsed into such facetiousness as 'I am making rapid progress in Gallopading, and my natural grace and symmetry of person greatly contribute to my advancement in that science', or was arch about 'the innumerable beauties and perfections of a certain Mademoiselle de Pappenheim'. Few women are considerate enough to allow themselves to be diverted by male humour from the realities of any situation they are considering; and the tenor of all his mother's letters, Thackeray lamented to her, was despondency and dissatisfaction. Unable to find in his mother the steadying sympathy he was in need of,

Thackeray by a natural rebound fell in love with a girl who was even less stable than himself. Isabella Shawe was pretty and mildly affectionate, but weak, slight, and dominated by a savage mother. Thackeray's demands on her puzzled and frightened Isabella. 'You must', he wrote during their engagement, 'love me with an awful affection, confide in me all your hopes and your wishes, your thoughts and your feelings; for I want you to be not a thoughtless and frivolous girl, but a wise and affectionate woman.' She was also required to be passionate and was bitterly reproached by Thackeray before their marriage for the decorum she opposed to his ardour. The many strains to which she was subjected between a jealous, scolding mother and an erratically uxorious husband proved too much for her, and in 1840, four years after their marriage and a few months after the birth of their third child, she lost her reason, jumping overboard as they were sailing to Cork to visit her mother, and paddling with her hands for twenty minutes before she was sighted by the ship's boat. After three or four weeks in his mother-in-law's house Thackeray could bear it no longer, and took his wife back to England. During the day he was abused and insulted by Mrs. Shawe, who complained that her daughter had been denied to her in time of health to be thrown on her in sickness. At night, to prevent more attempts at self-destruction, he attached himself to his wife with a rope, and was frequently awakened by her trying to get out of bed. 'Mong Jew what a time of it, from four o'clock till nine this morning—as soon as ever I was asleep my lady woke me,' he wrote to his mother in one of those bizarre outbursts of levity so fantastically incongruous as to suggest a strain of insanity in Thackeray himself.

For some years, during which he took her from one nursing home to another, Thackeray continued to hope that his wife would recover her reason, but by 1845 it was evident that she would never be better. His chief suffering came from her apathy and indifference. 'She cares for nothing, except for me a little,' he wrote to Mrs. Procter in 1841. Seven years later he was writing to Mrs. Brookfield about 'that poor little wife of mine, who now does not care 2d. for anything but her dinner and her glass of porter'; and in the same year, in a letter to his sister-in-law, he spoke of her as 'that dear artless sweet creature . . . whose reason it pleased God to destroy before her body: and who cares for none of us now'. In a story called

*Dennis Haggarty's Wife*, which he wrote two years after his wife's collapse, he expressed the agony of this second failure to appease his craving for love. Fitz-Boodle, the narrator of the story, meets Haggarty on Richmond terrace and inquires after his wife and children. "They've *left* me!" he burst out with a dreadful shout of passionate grief—a horrible scream which seemed to be wrenched out of his heart. . . . "I'm a wise man now, Mr. Fitz-Boodle. Jemima has gone away from me, and yet you know how I loved her, and how happy we were! I've got nobody now; but I'll die soon, that's one comfort: and to think it's she that'll kill me after all."

Haggarty is Thackeray without the humour and exquisite sensibility and spasmodic high spirits which fought for their lives in the gloom and confusion of his soul and, though terribly battered, carried him through to fame. The first number of *Vanity Fair* came out in January 1847, and a year later, some months before the appearance of the last number, Thackeray wrote to his mother: 'I am become a sort of great man in my way—all but at the top of the tree: indeed there if the truth were known and having a great fight up there with Dickens.' Thackeray at this time had for some years been in love with the wife of an old Cambridge friend, the Rev. William Brookfield. Mrs. Brookfield was vain, prudent, and circumspectly ambitious, everything that neither his wife nor mother had been; and, as both of these had failed him, inevitably Thackeray turned to someone altogether different from either in a last attempt to find anchorage in a woman. It was her poise, her beauty and her worldliness which appealed to his instability, his personal diffidence, and his sense of failure; but to have admitted to himself that she personified his mundane desires, quite apart from the fact that she was the wife of an old friend, would not have satisfied his deepest need for an embodiment of his ideal longings. So he transformed her into an angel whom he could worship without detriment to his friend's peace of mind. 'Her innocence, looks, angelical sweetness and kindness charm and ravish me to the highest degree,' he wrote to Brookfield, who after some years of this kind of thing was becoming restive, but consented, for the time being, to accept Thackeray's assurance that 'you and God Almighty may know all my thoughts about your wife'. The success of *Vanity Fair* widened the breach between Thackeray and Brookfield who, disappointed

in his own ambitions, grew increasingly impatient of the gratification his wife showed in having Thackeray at her feet. Meanwhile Thackeray's insistence on the purity of his love for his 'dear Sister and Friend' took up more and more space in his letters, though there was one extraordinary outburst when she told him she was with child, and he wrote back that he had spent a whole night in intense rage and jealousy. At last Brookfield had had enough, and a violent scene in which Thackeray denounced Brookfield in front of Mrs. Brookfield for his cruel treatment of his wife put an end to a situation that had passed beyond even Mrs. Brookfield's ability to manage.

This was in September 1851. Three years earlier Thackeray had written to Mrs. Procter: 'She [Mrs. Brookfield] never cared 2½d. for me—and my heart is a vacuum. But I go and see her and have a kind tender fraternal or paternal regard and that sort of thing.' In his heart he knew that what had ended in the final scene with the Brookfields had never really begun. It was his last frustration, and, though more than ten years of work and increasing fame lay before him, his hope of finding what he had missed did not renew itself.

## II

With his own sex no less than with women, though naturally not in such agonizing forms, Thackeray's curiously scattered and unfocused temperament was always getting him into difficulties. The greatest friendship in his life was with Edward FitzGerald, whose anxious, easily discouraged nature opened out in the warmth of Thackeray's youthful love as it was never to open out again. For a year or so round about twenty they shared all their hopes and doubts about this world and the next, and when they were not together FitzGerald, inspired by a glass of port, would express affection in verse,

Age may chill the warm hearts which I think so divine,  
But what warmth it has, Willy, shall ever be thine!  
... Till Death finds us waiting him patiently still,  
Willy looking at me, and I looking at Will

and Thackeray would mourn his friend's absence in simpler, more artless language than he ever used to a woman—'I don't think you would have gone had you known how wretched it makes me—I have not had such a cry since I was at school. . . . Good-night, boykin—God bless you, Teddibus.'

This springtime of affection could not last, and that it did not mature into a firm and lasting relationship was due quite as much to FitzGerald as to Thackeray, FitzGerald withdrawing into solitude to nourish his inertia and despondency on a private income, and Thackeray remaining in the world to support his family and himself. What is surprising, in someone so sensitive and affectionate as Thackeray, is that when, feeling FitzGerald to be hurt at never hearing from him, he wrote to assure him that he had not been spoilt by the success of *Vanity Fair*, he should conclude with: 'This letter has been delayed and delayed until I fancied it would never go. Nevertheless, I am always yours, and like you almost as much as I did twenty years ago.' What kind of encouragement would that afford the morbidly diffident FitzGerald? It is no wonder that two years later he should write to a friend: 'Thackeray is in such a great world that I am afraid of him; he gets tired of me and we are content to regard each other at a distance.'

These fits of freakish and altogether superfluous candour no doubt expressed Thackeray's momentary rebellion against the high sentiments to which he, like Dickens, Bulwer, and the rest, was constantly giving voice, but by which he, unlike the others, was convinced only while he was articulating them. Had he been consistently insincere, his reputation for sincerity would have been much more firmly based, but his spasms of frankness threw his false sentiment into relief. What, for example, could James Spedding, a member of the circle to which the Brookfields belonged, and therefore conversant, even to satiety, with the purity of Thackeray's passion for Mrs. Brookfield, make of him on getting a letter in which, after mentioning that Mrs. Brookfield was 'very soon to become a mamma', Thackeray continued: 'A comic poet once singing of an Irishman said, "Children should she bear Blest will be their daddy". And indeed I can conceive few positions more agreeable than his who is called upon to perform the part of husband to so sweet a creature.' As these lapses into actuality were not only at his own expense, they created an understandable feeling of anxiety and irritation among Thackeray's friends and acquaintances. Here are a few instances. At a dinner to Macready, who was unusually sensitive even for an actor, Thackeray gave a speech which Charlotte Brontë thought peculiarly characteristic. 'It seemed,' she said, 'scarcely to disguise a secret sneer at the whole concern.'

Henry Taylor, author of a drama in blank verse, friend and disciple of Wordsworth, and an important civil servant, was peculiarly unfitted to enjoy being rallied in print on his susceptibility to young girls. Yet Thackeray, concealing Taylor's identity from the public but not from his friends under the name of Timotheus, not only made his admiration for a Miss Virginia Pattle the subject of an article in *Punch*, but introduced a compliment to Mrs. Taylor on her good sense in professing, 'though possibly with a *little* factitious enthusiasm', to share her husband's admiration for the young beauty. The Taylors, perhaps from different angles, were extremely incensed, and Lady Ashburton had to ask Thackeray to postpone a visit until they had left. Macaulay, a fellow-guest at a dinner in Paris just after *Vanity Fair* had brought Thackeray well within his range of vision, was surprised and greatly displeased when Thackeray suggested that each should pretend to be the other for the benefit of an American lady who was arriving shortly for the purpose of hero-worshipping them both. Charles Lever, with whom Thackeray had been on very friendly terms during his Irish tour, was alienated by a parody Thackeray published in *Punch*, and caricatured him as Mr. Elias Howle in *Roland Cashel*. 'Howle,' he wrote, was 'large and heavily built, but neither muscular nor athletic; his frame and all his gestures indicated weakness and uncertainty. . . . The sinister expression of his eyes—half-submissive, half-satirical—suggested doubts of his sincerity. There was nothing honest about him but his mouth, this was large, full, thick-lipped and sensual. . . .'

Although in these, and other similar instances, one may not sympathize very acutely with the too serious or too sensitive personages whose dignity Thackeray had imperilled or whose vanity he had mortified, his bewilderment at the ill-feeling he aroused in his fellow-writers is itself bewildering. In a letter to his mother he attributed his unpopularity with Jerrold, Ainsworth, Dickens, Forster and Bulwer to their envy of his success; a true enough diagnosis certainly, but, as he himself felt, not a complete one, for he adds: 'I scarcely understand any motive for any action of my own or anybody else's.' Thackeray's mistake was in trying to double the parts of Puck and Polonius. In one mood, as his campaign against Edmund Yates showed, he saw himself as a dignified public figure, a lettered gentleman, whom society had to protect against the

lampoons of Grub Street hacks. In another mood he would pluck the stool from beneath any contemporary whose stately bearing was preying on his nerves.

It was the impossibility of relying on Thackeray to support the dignity of the literary calling which made Dickens and his second-in-command John Forster mistrustful of Thackeray from the first, and which militated against a politic alliance with him when he became, after *Vanity Fair*, Dickens's most formidable rival. The success of *Pickwick* marked Dickens out from the beginning of Thackeray's career as the writer he had to measure himself against. Dickens, on the other hand, had no reason to trouble himself seriously about Thackeray before *Vanity Fair*. But he had his eye on him, and, while keeping his powder dry, was always ready to respond to Thackeray's effusive, if intermittent, overtures. 'I have made much friends with him [Dickens],' Thackeray wrote in 1843: and in the following year he told his mother that Boz had been touched to the quick by his tribute to *A Christmas Carol*. In the summer of 1847, half-way through the serialization of *Vanity Fair*, Forster, incensed by Thackeray's sudden upward jump, remarked to Tom Taylor, in reference to Thackeray's parodies of contemporary writers, that he was 'false as hell'. Amused by Forster's vehemence, Taylor passed these words on to Thackeray with a laugh which, to his surprise, Thackeray did not echo. Eventually, through Dickens's intervention, peace was re-established, and a little later Thackeray wrote Dickens a letter which has not been preserved, but which probably expressed Thackeray's grief over the death of Paul Dombey. Dickens, in his reply, said that he was 'cut tender, as it were, to the very heart' by Thackeray's generous letter, and that there was nothing in the world or out of it to which he was so sensitive as the least mark of such a manly and generous regard. He then touched on the question of Thackeray's parodies, and, after a whimsical confession that he had felt the absurdity and injustice of being left out of them, went on to say that he did not admire the design, thinking it a great pity that writers should take advantage of the means their calling gave them to depreciate and vulgarize one another. He was, he continued, saving up the perusal of *Vanity Fair* until he had finished *Dombey*, and meanwhile must confess that he had cried most bitterly over Thackeray's *The Curate's Walk*, with its affecting picture of that cockboat manned by babies. Reverting



to Thackeray's letter he repeated how proud and happy he was to have received it, but said that if he were to pursue the subject his style would be full of every fault except insincerity.

Insincerity was the skeleton in all these Victorian cupboards, and the charge which each Victorian, his back firmly pressed against his own cupboard, would hurl most readily against his enemy of the moment. The trouble with Thackeray, from the standpoint of his contemporaries, was that he could never be depended upon not to start nudging them and winking meaningly at their cupboards and his own. What, for example, did Dickens and Forster think when, having accepted the author of *Vanity Fair* as a great man, and having, as they hoped, at last persuaded him to take his calling and his colleagues seriously, he wrote to Forster on April 2, the day of Forster's birth and Dickens's marriage: 'And I wish you many happy returns of your birthday, Dickens of his marriage-day, and both of you of the day previous'?

### III

The last two volumes of Mr. Gordon Ray's edition of Thackeray's correspondence cover the period from 1852 to his death on Christmas Eve, 1863. In the early summer of 1852 Thackeray published *Henry Esmond*, which is steeped in his suffering over Mrs. Brookfield, but fails altogether to express the truth of their relationship. The age of Queen Anne, as pictured in this novel, is not in the least like the age of Queen Victoria as it was being experienced by Thackeray and the Brookfields; Thackeray bore no resemblance to the grave, impeccable, and tedious hero; and Mrs. Brookfield had only vanity in common with the brilliant adventuress, Beatrix, and nothing at all in common with her mother, Lady Castlewood, love's victim, whose heart swells through the years with her unspoken adoration of *Henry Esmond*. In a letter written not more than a year after *Esmond* to his two chief confidantes, Mrs. Elliot and Kate Perry, whose opinion of Mrs. Brookfield one would greatly value, Thackeray referred to a passage in *Esmond* which pictures the hero smitten to his knees by the thought of 'the splendour and purity of his dear mistress's love'. Passing from Lady Castlewood to Mrs. Brookfield, he continues: 'I behold that beautiful constancy with wonder and thanks to God—with such a feeling as one looks at the Alps or the stars in heaven.' He and Mrs. Brookfield, he says, must

love each other 'in the grave, as it were': there must be no secret meetings, no deceit. 'Preach this to her again and again,' he adjures his correspondents. 'Go and wipe away her tears, you dear kind sisters of charity.' What is singular about Thackeray is not that he should soothe himself with an imaginary Mrs. Brookfield sacrificing love to duty, but that he should slither from melting adoration to savage resentment and back again without, apparently, any awareness of the effect he must be producing on his correspondents or any compunction for the nervous strain they were undergoing in trying to conform with his incalculable variations of mood. It appears from the context that Mrs. Brookfield's 'beautiful constancy' was the constancy which bound her to Brookfield. Yet, a little earlier, on hearing that this constancy was shortly to bear fruit in a child, Thackeray wrote to Kate Perry that he could not forgive Mrs. Brookfield and hoped she would go into the country and increase her family in seclusion. Earlier still he told Kate that he had been played with by a woman and flung out at a beck from her lord and master; and added 'The thought that I have been made a fool of is the bitterest of all, perhaps.' It was also his deepest and most durable thought about Mrs. Brookfield, his real estimate of whom emerges in a letter to Kate Perry written some years after the break. Having heard that Mrs. Brookfield was toying with the notion of becoming a Catholic, he remarks that she was quite capable of popping into a confessional and being baptized before she knew where she was, 'and then she would tell her husband, and then it would be *bon jour*; and away would go Magdalene and Arthur and the Inspector (her children and husband) in one cab, and she in another, to Our Lady of Sorrows and two guineas a week for her board; and good-bye to the children, and to friends whom she loves as a sister, and to those who have loved her as women are not loved every day.' That, in the end, was how Mrs. Brookfield appeared to him, considered as a woman whom he had met in the world and with whom he had had an uneasy intimacy, stunted by prudence on her side and by incoherence on his. But Mrs. Brookfield, as she had once seemed to his unhappy craving heart, probably remained with him always as something separate from what she had turned out to be; the dreams her beauty embodied for him becoming in time more real than waking experience, yet retaining enough of that reality to give substance to perhaps the most moving

passage in his work, when Clive after a long separation sees Ethel Newcome again: 'And the past and its dear histories, and youth and its hopes and passions, and tones and looks for ever echoing in the heart, and present in the memory—these, no doubt, poor Clive saw and heard as he looked across the great gulf of time, and parting and grief, and beheld the woman he had loved for many years.'

In the autumn of 1852 Thackeray went to the States on a lecture tour. He wanted to leave his two daughters ten thousand pounds apiece, and, though he dreaded the sea voyage, which he seems to have regarded as a venture in the Drake vein, and disliked lecturing as an ungentlemanly occupation, he set out manfully to coin his growing fame into gold. 'It is a little rain of dollars,' he wrote to Mrs. Elliot and Kate Perry from America; 'pray Heaven to send plenty of the rain.' Unlike Dickens, whose only astonishment where money and applause were concerned was on the rare occasions when the sweep of the cataract suffered a momentary diminution, Thackeray never ceased to be surprised by the eminence on which he found himself in his later years and by the large sums the public was willing to pay to read him or to hear him talk. At heart he remained timid and unsure of himself, and his lack of self-confidence must have been greatly intensified by the constant disorders due to his total inability to limit his eating and drinking. Once, after a severe attack of cramps and spasms, he was asked if he had taken the best medical advice, and replied that he had: 'but what is the use of advice if you don't follow it? They tell me not to drink, and I *do* drink. They tell me not to smoke, and I *do* smoke. They tell me not to eat, and I *do* eat. In short, I do everything that I am desired not to do, and, therefore, what am I to expect?' Yet in spite of everything, in spite of his insane wife and the too sane wife of Brookfield and his gloomy, moralizing mother, in spite of his laziness and sensuality and contempt for the novelist's trade, in spite of the hostility of his fellow-writers and the intimidating spectacle of his great rival's immense and never-relaxing energy, there he was at fifty, in his town mansion, wealthy and famous. 'Think,' he wrote to his mother in the year before his death, 'of twenty years ago and the wife crazy and the publisher refusing me £15 who owes me £13 10s., and *The Times* to which I apply for a little more than five

guineas for a week's work, refusing to give me more, and all that money difficulty ended, God be praised, and an old gentleman sitting in a fine house like the hero at the end of a story!

In the autumn of 1853 Thackeray took his two daughters to the Continent for a visit which lasted some months. From Rome in the following February he wrote to a friend that his health had been awful of late, and that he had seen nothing of the jolly artist-life he had expressly looked for in Rome. 'Having to be with ladies is very moral, right paternal, and so forth: but, having to dine with my little women at home, I couldn't go to Bohemia. . . . Never mind. My girls are the very best in the world: the most cheerful: pleasant to be with: affectionate—*they* have been happy this tour at any rate.' The elder, Anne, was sixteen at this time, the younger, Minny, thirteen. Neither of them had known their mother, and their grandmother, with whom they often stayed, drilled religion into them; so they turned increasingly to their father, who was at his best with them, companionable, affectionate, and understanding. As they loved him, he did not need to crave for something beyond his reach, and as he had nothing of the tyrant their dependence on him was an altogether beneficial influence, bringing out his tenderness and acting as a check on the vagaries which were such a disturbing element in his intercourse with the rest of the world. The bond between them strengthened as the years passed. 'No one has come to marry either of my dear girls,' Thackeray wrote in 1860, and two years later he uttered the same rather puzzled complaint. The fear, which turned out to be ungrounded, that they would never marry depressed them at times, their father noticed; but their devotion to him was the keystone of their lives, and their desolation when he died attests the wonderful qualities of heart and mind so often overlaid both in his life and his work by the other elements in his strangely mixed nature. In a letter to a friend nearly a year after her father's death, Anne wrote: 'Minnie is going out for a drive with Mrs. Carlyle this afternoon—we met old Thomas the other day on his horse and he suddenly began to cry. I shall always love him in future, for I used to fancy he did not care about Papa.' If not an expression of his own regret for Thackeray, the tears of Carlyle at least witnessed to his sudden sense of what Thackeray had meant to his daughters, standing forlornly before him.

## 3

## RUDYARD KIPLING

MR. SHANKS seems to have written this book<sup>1</sup> in the heart-sinking mood of a man trying to persuade himself that an old enthusiasm is still as strong as ever. His predicament is least enviable when he tries to discriminate between what he calls Kipling's 'authoritarianism' and 'the totalitarian state as we now see it on the Continent'. In his youth Kipling wrote:

An' if you treat a nigger to a dose of cleanin'-rod  
'E's like to show you ever'ying he owns.

In his later years, as Mr. Shanks points out, he expressed the strongest disapproval of German violence and aggression; but a change of situation is not a change of heart. No doubt the nigger expressed the strongest disapproval of the cleaning-rod. The best that Mr. Shanks can do for Kipling as a political thinker is to claim that he influenced the political thought of H. G. Wells. In a story called *With the Night Mail* Kipling pictured a world run by an Aerial Board, who control all the traffic of the planet. Their motto is 'Transport is Civilization', and it cannot be denied that Mr. Wells's *The Shape of Things to Come* is inspired by the same faith.

Mr. Shanks has, however, given a clear account of Kipling's work, with illustrative quotations, so many and so well chosen that a reader unacquainted with Kipling could form a fairly complete idea of him from this book alone, however widely this idea might differ from the one urged by Mr. Shanks.

Round about 1890 England had become sick of peace, retrenchment and reform; the craving for violence which recurs after every long period of peace was beginning to be felt, and a number of writers, Conan Doyle, Rider Haggard, Stanley Weyman and Seton Merriman, were already strenuously catering for the mood expressed in Robert Louis Stevenson's 'Shall we never shed blood?' In addition to the men of talent who serve as mediums for their generation, there is usually a man of genius who is entangled in the predominant

<sup>1</sup> *Rudyard Kipling. A Study in Literature and Political Ideas.* By Edward Shanks.

desires of his time by some weakness or division in his nature. Byron, driven by his vanity to compete for universal attention with Napoleon, sacrificed his gifts to the current taste for blighted Titans; Dickens, who was extremely ill-adapted to marriage, became the laureate of the Victorian hearth; and Kipling, a nervous misanthropic artist, preached action and service, and figured in the minds of the late Victorian public as a man who was never happy except at some danger point on the outskirts of the Empire.

Kipling, who anticipated Hitler in the use of the swastika as an emblem for his work, had the same nostalgic admiration for the ruling caste of his country. In *Stalky and Co.* he pictured his old school as run on public school lines, with fags and the rest of the gear, and as suffused, under a right-feeling headmaster, with imperialistic sentiment. But from a recent book by G. C. Beresford, who was a close friend of Kipling at school, it appears that there were no fags, that the boys were not interested in the Empire, and that the headmaster, an amiable man with aesthetic and socialistic leanings, was a friend of Burne-Jones, whom he once helped to organize a Workmen's Neutrality Demonstration against the imperialistic Beaconsfield. Kipling, according to Beresford, was a podgy boy with spectacles, who hated games, as is plain in *Stalky and Co.*, but was not, as in that book, a resourceful rebel against the masters and the athletes. Almost as dark as a native of India, where he was born, Kipling was chiefly remarkable for his precocious knowledge of books and art. There was a tough set in the college, but Kipling avoided it, favoured by the unsystematized tone of the place. Yet even in an ordinary public school he would probably have got off lightly, for as his cordial relations with the headmaster show, he soon developed that knack of being in with authority which was later to make him the spokesman of everything least congenial to his poetic side.

Convincing though Beresford is on the whole, his anxiety to picture the youthful Kipling as utterly indifferent to the enthusiasms of his maturity sometimes carries him too far. Shortly before Kipling left school, a lunatic tried to assassinate Queen Victoria, and Kipling wrote a poem which Beresford suggests was not quite serious. It is supposed to be a message of loyalty from the college, and appears to be quite as serious as any of his subsequent performances in the same style:

And some of us have fought for You  
Already in the Afghan pass—  
Or where the scarce-seen smoke-puffs flew  
From Boer marksmen in the grass

Once more we greet You, though unseen  
Our greeting be, and coming slow,  
Trust us if need arise, O Queen,  
We shall not tarry with the blow

On leaving school Kipling returned to India, where his father was curator of the museum at Lahore. Both his parents were devoted to Rudyard, advising and directing him until his early marriage provided him with another guardian.

As a journalist in India, Kipling suffered a good deal of mortification. Un-English to look at, and with parents who did not belong to the ruling Anglo-Indian caste, he passed through an anti-social phase, in which he preferred the company of soldiers and natives to that of sahibs. But 'the bitter paths wherein I stray' led quickly into the highway of fame and wealth, and in his early twenties he was back in England, where he found the public disposed to welcome any writing which was not about themselves. Half a century of money-making had disgusted the nation with that scrambling of pigs round the trough which the Victorians called individualism, and everyone was ready to be regimented into a nobler form of existence. There were socialists who dreamed of a perfect world, and imperialists who dreamed of a still larger Empire, but at bottom everyone had the same desire, to take refuge from himself in collective action.

Kipling, having escaped from Kipling, expressed his new-found philosophy through Dick Heldar, the hero of a novel appropriately called *The Light that Failed*. Men, says Dick Heldar, must live under orders, and never think for themselves or have real satisfaction in their work. Human beings were only material to work with, and what they said or did was of no consequence. Who issues the orders under which men must live, Heldar does not say, nor did Kipling ever ask. In all his work he accepted the collective instinct of the herd—'The law of the pack'—as infallible, and envied animals for obeying this law unquestioningly. 'The poor brute man,' he writes, 'an imperfectly denatured animal intermittently subject to the unpredictable reactions of an unlocated spiritual area'—a sentence which reveals an attitude to religion similar

to A. E. Housman's, another unharmonized poet who kindled more easily to Queen Victoria than to God.

With machines, as even more predictable than animals, Kipling always felt at ease, after he had invested them with enough personality to make them companionable, and not enough to make them capricious. Judging from one of his silliest and most famous poems, he would have enjoyed *Romeo and Juliet* more if Romeo had been a stoker and Juliet a turbine:

Why don't poets tell?

I'm sick of all their quirks and turns—the loves and doves they dream—  
Lord, send a man like Robbie Burns to sing the song o' Steam

Interdependence absolute, foreshadowed, ordained, decreed,  
To work, ye'll note, at any tilt an' every rate of speed.  
An' singin' like the Mornin' Stars for joy that they are made;  
While, out o' touch o' vanity, the sweatin' thrust-block says.  
'Not unto us the praise, or man—not unto us the praise!'

The cruelty in Kipling sprang from the envy of happier natures in which his deification of the machine, literal or metaphorical, was rooted. When Dick Heldar loses his eyesight, he cannot face life, which had only been bearable to him for the sights which distracted him from himself. He goes to the Soudan, and is killed by a stray bullet while listening to the slaughter of some natives who had imprudently attacked an armoured train. Wild with delight at the sounds and smells, he stretches himself on the floor of the train, crying: 'God is very good—I never thought I'd hear this again. Give 'em hell, men! Oh, give 'em hell!'

This is not the brutality of a crude and vigorous man. Kipling is always the observer, never the actor, in his imagined scenes of violence, finding a balm for his own self-contempt in picturing the humiliation and suffering of others. In one of his stories, *My Sunday at Home*, he narrates how a navvy thrashes a doctor who, mistakenly believing he has swallowed poison, gives him an emetic. The person who tells the story is careful not to interfere. 'I withdrew to a strategic distance on the overhead bridge, and, abiding in the exact centre, looked on afar.'

*The Mutiny of the Mavericks* brings out still more clearly how much of the bully's jackal there was in Kipling, whose enthusiasm for the British Empire was always most feverish when there was trouble with some small nation. In this story



an agitator joins an Irish regiment, to promote sedition, and is taken into action by two tommies who have guessed his mission. He tries to escape, but is heaved and kicked back, and at last, mad with fear and frothing at the mouth, rushes forward and is killed. The story ends with one of the tommies being asked by the other if he would have shot the man, had he come back alive, and replying, 'I doubt I wud bekase of the fun he gave us'—a fitting remark to round off an incident as incredible as it is disgusting, men engaged in an action having neither the time nor the mood for stage-managing comic effects.

The vein of cruelty in Kipling was not accepted as a virile protest against over-civilized effeminacy without some preliminary squirming. Sir Ian Hamilton, who met Kipling when he was becoming known in India for his *Departmental Duties*, offered to take some of his work back to England, and submit it to two authors of his acquaintance, Andrew Lang and William Sharp. The result was told by Sir Ian in *The Daily Sketch* at the time of Kipling's death. The story Kipling entrusted to Ian Hamilton was *The Mark of the Beast*, in which two Anglo-Indians torture a native leper. Andrew Lang, after reading it, said that he would gladly give a fiver not to have read 'this poisonous stuff'. William Sharp advised the instant burning of 'this detestable piece of work', and predicted that the author would die mad before the age of thirty. Within a year everyone was talking about Kipling, and Andrew Lang, Sir Ian says, had become one of his warmest admirers. Charity may cover a multitude of sins, but success transmutes them into virtues.

Having become a member of the ruling caste, Kipling raised as many barriers as possible between himself and the rest of mankind. The author of

It is enough that through Thy giace  
I saw naught common on Thy earth

spent much of his time discriminating between himself and the 'lesser breeds without the Law', among whom at one time or another he included Russians, Americans, and Germans, to say nothing of such lesser subdivisions of humanity as M.P.s travelling in India, Fenians, pacifists and 'the suburban Toilet-Club favoured by the late Mr. Oscar Wilde'. Though he valued knowledge in general, he preferred inside knowledge,

which he communicated in what might be called an inside style, the tone of a man talking allusively with two or three friends, as experienced as himself. A genteel public for whom the old English novelists were too coarse felt flattered at being allowed to overhear what Kipling was saying. In Fielding people thrashed each other with cudgels, in a vulgar unfinished way, careless what members of the public might hurry to the scene. In Kipling—'Biel came out of the Court, and Strickland dropped a gut trainer's whip in the verandah. Ten minutes later Biel was cutting Bronckhorst into ribbons behind the old Court cells, quietly and without scandal. What was left of Bronckhorst was sent home in a carriage; and his wife wept over it and nursed it into a man again.'

This raffish sham-masculine style intimidated the overfed eighteen-nineties, and when Kipling asked 'What do they know of England, who only England know?' the public hung their heads, instead of replying that they knew a good deal more than could be known to anyone rich and famous at twenty-five. But there is no reason to suppose that Kipling did not share the illusions of his public. He had travelled widely, and amassed a lot of facts. It was the age of science, information was more valued than insight, quantity than quality, and Kipling, like his French equivalent Zola, pursued life with a note-book in his hand.

Underneath his confused philosophy there was a love for the English countryside which went deep into his nature, touching what was least damaged in him:

Take of English earth as much  
As either hand may lightly clutch.  
In the taking of it breathe  
Prayer for all who lie beneath . . .  
Lay that earth upon your heart.  
And your sickness shall depart.

In *My Sunday at Home*, between the convulsions of the navy and the groans of the pummelled doctor, the narrator looks out over the countryside—'What a Garden of Eden it was, this fatted clipped and washen land! . . . A light puff of wind—it scattered flakes of may over the gleaming rails—gave me a faint whiff as it might have been of fresh coconut, and I knew that the golden gorse was in bloom somewhere out of sight.' Kipling's poetic feeling for England comes out here, though it is flawed by the implied reference to the anything

but fatted, clipped, and washen lands from which the narrator is enjoying a temporary surcease. As is usual with those who decry the individual, Kipling could never rise above himself, and it would be difficult to find fifty consecutive words in any of his landscapes free from some trace of his wary, hard-bitten, informed pose. His descriptions suffer also from an excess of detail. It is not the business of a poet, Wordsworth said, to take an inventory of nature. The brilliant vivid touches in Kipling too often lose themselves in a mass of impressions which seem to have been memorized on the spot, and when these have been exhausted bravado or rhetoric takes their place, as in this conclusion of a long passage, the essence of which could have been put into ten lines—'In a deep dene behind me an eddy of sudden wind drummed through sheltered oaks, and spun aloft the first dry sample of autumn leaves. When I reached the beach the sea-fog fumed over the brickfields, and the tide was telling all the grasses of the gale beyond Ushant. In less than an hour summer England vanished in chill grey. We were again the shut island of the North, all the ships of the world bellowing at our perilous gates; and between their outcries ran the piping of bewildered gulls.'

When the first world war broke out, Kipling wrote a poem telling what England had to defend—

Comfort, content, delight,  
The ages' slow-bought gain.

Kipling's England was the England of the Athenaeum, Carlton and Beefsteak clubs, of the country-house and the working population as it shows itself to the well-to-do; and in the landscape of this England, as its best ornament, he placed Georgie, the Brushwood Boy, a strange bloom of that sentimentalization of the upper classes which was one of the unexpected products of a democratic century. Georgie belongs to a county family, drops his g's, is a first-rate regimental officer, is unaware of the adoration women feel for him, and when he comes home on leave reduces the house-keeper to tears of pious gratitude and causes profound emotion among the men staff from the butler down to the under-keeper. To this projection of his ideal man Kipling gives the dreams in which he himself escaped from the herd, from the tumult about nothing and the shouting about everything—

Over the edge of the purple down,  
 Where the single lamplight gleams,  
 Know ye the road to Merciful Town  
 That is laid by the Sea of Dreams—  
 Where the poor may lay their wrongs away,  
 And the sick may forget to weep?  
 But we—pity us! Oh, pity us!—  
 We wakeful, ah, pity us!  
 We must go back with Policeman Day—  
 Back from the City of Sleep.

Not good poetry, but touching in its revelation of his shrinking from the daytime, and in the pity for the poor and sick which as the fugleman of the herd he had to keep to himself. Like all divided natures he was frightened of life, and his best work was either in the expression of this terror, as in the mad visions of the tortured soldier in *The Man Who Would be King*, or an evocation of some world removed from ordinary existence, as in the Puck and Jungle books, or such a poem as *Mandalay*:

Ah, it's there that I would be  
 By the old Moulmein pagoda  
 Lookin' lazy at the sea

As he shrank from understanding himself, he was unable to understand others. The characters in his stories are hardly more than puppets through whom Kipling ventriloquizes the sentiments he thinks proper to their place in the social hierarchy. The Brushwood Boy keeps the Ten Commandments as he will later keep a butler, whereas people who drop their aitches, like the soldier Mulvaney and the self-made millionaire, Sir Andrew Gloster, are allowed some fun with women to sweeten their social degradation. Kipling's notion of illicit love, and its place in the scheme of things, may be gathered from the consolatory remarks addressed by the ageing Sir Andrew to his wife:

An' a man must go with a woman, as you could not understand,  
 But I never talked 'em secrets, I paid 'em out of hand.  
 . . . I'm sick of the hued women—I'll kiss my girl on her lips!  
 I'll be content with my fountain, I'll drink from my own well,  
 And the wife of my youth shall charm me—an' the rest can go to  
 Hell!

Between the aitchless adulterers and the Brushwood Boy Kipling placed his Indian civilians, engineers and other public servants, whose clipped speech and mannered stoicism expressed that mixture of an atheistic Puritanism and the saloon

bar which seemed to him the proper attitude towards the harshness of existence. He praised a realistic acceptance of life, celebrating 'The great God Dungara, the God of Things as They Are, Most Terrible, One-Eyed, Wearing the Red Elephant Tusk'; but a realist would have chosen a less odd-looking creature to embody reality. What Kipling in his heart felt about the God of Things as They Are, how bitterly he rebelled against a scheme of things in which he could see no purpose and no pity, comes out in the simplest and most moving of his stories, *Without Benefit of Clergy*. In this story an Indian civilian loses his Indian mistress and the child she had borne him, and as he rides back to his quarters he puts his hand before his eyes and utters, 'Oh, you brute! You utter brute!'

This fear and loathing of the unknown power which tormented men was the reverse side of Kipling's delight in cruelty inflicted by hardier persons than himself. When he was a child, his parents on leaving for India placed him in the charge of a woman who, together with her son, made his life wretched for some years. This time is movingly described in his autobiography, and is doubtless reflected in the stories where children are protected from some menace by a dauntless champion, Rikki-Tikki-Tavi, the mongoose, who saves the small English boy from the cobra and his wife, or the she-wolf who intimidates Mowgli's enemy, the tiger. The Lama in *Kim* also embodies Kipling's revulsion from the cruelty of life, though less effectively. A woolly old man, who bears the same relation to Buddha as the Vicar of Wakefield to Christ, he has one moment of intense feeling. A native veteran is recounting how he remained loyal to the English during the Mutiny, encouraged by an officer who said to him, 'Be content. There is great work forward. When this madness is over, there is a recompense.' 'Ay,' the lama mutters half to himself, 'there is a recompense when the madness is over, surely.'

Kipling did not profit from these moments of insight. His experiences in South Africa, where he saw something of war for the first time, deepened his feeling against life, but he drew from them no more illuminating conclusion than:

'We have had an Imperial lesson, it may make us an Empire yet.'

In the years that followed he wrote about children and fairies, instead of about the day's work and the seven seas,

and though the imperial dream still haunted him, he preferred it softened by distance, picturing Roman or Norman imperialists instead of the contemporary type, and substituting Sir Richard Dalyngridge, one of William the Conqueror's knights, for the Brushwood Boy.

What was best in his character expressed itself in the care and pains he expended on his work. His life was disciplined, and there is a touch of greatness in his lines when the first world war broke out:

No easy hopes or lies  
Shall bring us to our goal,  
But non sacrifice  
Of body, will, and soul.

But he could not keep on this level, he had too much of the hatred generated by fear, and the cruelty of inward despair. During the war a rumour spread that the Kaiser had cancer of the throat, and Kipling wrote a poem beginning:

‘This is the State above the Law  
The State exists for the State alone.’  
*(This is a gland at the back of the jaw,  
And an answering lump by the collar-bone.)*

After the war, during the Armistice, he wrote:

These were our children who died for our lands: they were dear in  
our sight.  
We have only the memory left of their home-treasured sayings and  
laughter.  
The price of our loss shall be paid to our hands, not another's  
hereafter.  
Neither the Alien nor Priest shall decide on it. That is our right.  
But who shall restore us our children?

The death of his son in the war gave its intensity of regret and ferocity to this poem, which epitomizes the unreconciled contradictions in his nature. Sunk in his own bitterness, he was unable to see the connexion between his son's death and the enthusiasm of the Kaiser for his writings, who kept a copy of ‘If’ framed above his desk. ‘We but teach bloody instructions, which, being taught, return to plague the inventor.’

The kind of emotionalism about the Empire which gave Kipling his triumph was cooling before the first world war and extinct after it. From time to time Kipling took down the old trumpet and blew a few notes at the sound of which ageing readers of the *Morning Post* momentarily remembered their youth. But there was no throb or glow any more in his limping

bitterness. How faint was the impulse behind these strains may be inferred from a note in the diaries of John Bailey, under the date March 27, 1919: 'Dined at the Club. Kipling told us that he had been struck with the number of Colonial soldiers who felt that they had been for the first time in a world which was full of life, of incidents, of variety, of memories of art and history—and who felt that they would never again be able to stay content in Australia or Canada, with nothing great in them but space.'

These sentiments did not lead Kipling to revise his youthful gospel, for to the last he kept self-examination at bay. Not long before his death he wrote a short story in which he repeated through Shakespeare's mouth the philosophy of life formerly expressed through Dick Helder. The story shows Shakespeare working on a passage in Isaiah, sent him for revision by one of the translators of the Authorized Version. Ben Jonson is with him in his orchard, and they talk together, Jonson full of his grievances and his art, Shakespeare genially contemptuous of both. He was not yet ass enough, he said, to hawk up his private spites before the groundlings, who 'pay their penny for pleasure'. His own works were written without any reference to his own feelings. *King Lear* was clapped up as a vomit for Burbage when 'poor Dick was at odds with the world in general and womenkind in special'. The emetic having done its work, 'I served him my *Macbeth* to toughen him.' The clergyman he is helping with Isaiah, Shakespeare says, was moved by some lines in *Macbeth*, seeing in them a parable of himself 'going down darkling to his tomb, 'twixt cliffs of ice and iron'. Jonson, struck by this phrase of Kipling's, says he knows nothing by Shakespeare of that quality, and Shakespeare replies that the clergyman may have been referring to some lines beginning 'To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow'.

Lear is divided between power and love, and at the end turns away from power—'No, no, no, no! come, let's away to prison.' Macbeth, the prototype of all who expect satisfaction from the domination of others, is suffocated at last in the vacuum of a life drained of its essence. The discomfort verging on disgust with which Lear affected Kipling illumines the limitations which helped his early triumph; the cliffs of ice and iron, echoing Macbeth's final soliloquy, reveal his later despair.

IN the course of his rectorial address at St. Andrews, Barrie said: 'Don't put your photographs at all ages into your autobiography. That is a tragic mistake. My Life; and What I have Done With It. That is the sort of title, but it is the photographs that give away what you have done with it. Grim things these portraits; if you could read the language of them you would often find it unnecessary to read the book.'

Barrie's latest photographs—I remember one of him at Kirriemuir, which he had visited in connexion with some Barrie celebration—show extreme wretchedness, but even in his early forties there is no trace of happiness in his face. Mr. Denis Mackail gives an excellent photograph of him at this time, as a frontispiece to his biography.<sup>1</sup> In spite of a high forehead and fine eyes, and a general delicacy of structure which indicates unusual intelligence and sensibility, the total effect is chilling. It is a hard resentful face, the face of someone whose sympathy and tenderness are turned in on himself, and for whom other people exist only as ministers to his own self-love and self-pity. There are as many kinds of egotism as of human beings. Barrie's was the most insistent and pervasive of all, the kind which is found only in those whom the Victorians called 'mother's darlings', and who are nowadays said to be suffering from a mother-complex.

What Barrie and his mother were really like together must be a matter of conjecture. He has portrayed her in *Margaret Ogilvy*, where he pictures himself, after the death of a brother, trying to comfort his mother by standing on his head. 'I suppose I was an odd little figure. I have been told that my anxiety to brighten her gave my face a strained look . . . but she did laugh suddenly now and then, whereupon I screamed exultantly to that dear sister who was ever waiting to come and see the sight, but by the time she came the dear face was wet again.' Clearly the reality of Kirriemuir is not here. David Barrie, James's father, was a working-man, he had a large family, and his wife's favourite child was James, in whom she

<sup>1</sup> *The Story of J. M. B.* A Biography by Denis Mackail.



recognized talents through which she would be able to enjoy, if only vicariously, a better life than she had known as the wife of a poor Scotch weaver. Beneath the surface of *Margaret Ogilvy* one is conscious of the implacable self-love which mother and son pooled for their mutual benefit, to the dumb discomfiture of the father.

Spoilt children get on quickly in the world, for most people conform to the attitude expected of them; and the child who is given what he cries for at six will usually be given what he asks for at thirty. In his middle twenties Barrie was already doing well as a journalist in London, and two or three years later, having by this time mastered the technique of presenting Kirriemuir to southern readers, he became famous with *A Window in Thrums*, of which *Punch* wrote:

Let pessimists potter and pule, and let savages slaughter and harry;  
Give me Hendry and Tammas and Jess, and a smile and a tear born  
of Barrie.

But however quickly fame and money had come to Barrie they would have come too slowly to escape his bitterness at their delay. The most revealing of his works, one which in later years he did his best to keep out of the way of possible readers, is *Better Dead*, a satirical fantasy written in 1886, when he was still unknown, except to the editors who were looking after him. It is the story of a young Scot, Andrew Riach, who, leaving his native place, Wheens, and its imbecile or depraved inhabitants, comes to London, where, finding it impossible to earn money honestly, he scrapes along by lending himself to petty devices for boosting actors, papers and so on. His nausea at life grows, he jabs at passers-by in the streets, and reproves a mother for shrieking when her child slips from her arms to the pavement. Then he meets the President of a Society for Doing Without Some People, the aim of which is to assassinate the chief public figures of the day, Rosebery, Randolph Churchill, Chamberlain, Stead, Bradlaugh and many others. Andrew becomes an enthusiastic member, pleads for the inclusion of the leading writers, Tennyson, Browning and Ruskin, and goes on to urge that no one over forty-five should be spared. Andrew, however, has a neck which appeals to the strangling impulses in the President, and the story ends with Andrew's flight, and return to Wheens, where we leave him married to one of the more

imbecile natives, and regarding his two children with a strong desire to crack their skulls together

*Better Dead* corresponds in Barrie's work to *The Voyage of the Houyhnhnms* in Swift's, but it contains no sage horses and honest enduring Gulliver to balance the Yahoos. It must have been obvious to Barrie that if he was to live and prosper, there was nothing for it but to deal very drastically with his Yahoos, scrapping most of them and disguising the rest in fancy costumes. For day-dreaming he had a natural aptitude, and henceforth he called upon this faculty to provide the sugar coating for his pills. Much of this falsification was deliberate, he was resolved to be famous and wealthy, and thought the public deserved to be given what it was contemptible enough to desire. But his day-dreams were also for his own consolation. As Mr. Mackail points out, Barrie was always dramatizing himself, playing some part which he hoped would charm, impress or intimidate others, as the occasion required. Once, for example, feeling that he had been badly treated by his producer, Frohman, Barrie, to quote Mr. Mackail, 'drifted off towards stoicism or simulated indifference—and examining himself again saw that they weren't altogether unbecoming. They made him more mysterious and baffling to the onlookers. He liked that. It put them, however tall they were, at an unmistakable disadvantage. This had always been one of his best parts.'

His first experiments in sweetening his experience for public consumption were relatively mild, and one of them, *My Lady Nicotine*, was a delightful book, which has the same place in Barrie's work as *The Pickwick Papers* in Dickens's. Each was written when its author was just becoming famous, and each has a lightness of heart not felt before or after. There is, of course, no comparison in comic genius, but Barrie's group of journalists, bound together by a common love for the Arcadia smoking mixture, play their parts very amusingly in what Barrie might have called Butterfly Street, for that it was the real Grub Street he would hardly at that date have had the hardihood to maintain. Thirty years later, in his rectorial address on Courage, his powers of make-believe had become equal to anything. This is how he pictures his entry into Fleet Street, where during his first year he earned three hundred pounds—'The greatest glory that has ever come to me was to be swallowed up in London, not knowing a soul, with no

means of subsistence, and the fun of working till the stars went out. To have known anything would have spoilt it. I didn't even quite know the language. I rang for my boots and they thought I said a glass of water, so I drank the water and worked on. There was no food in the cupboard, so I didn't need to waste time in eating. . . . Oh, to be a freelance of journalism again—that darling jade! Those were days. Too good to last.'

In the middle nineties, while he was still working the Kirremuir mine, two Free Church ministers, Ian Maclaren, and S. R. Crockett, came forward with their own samples of Scotch humour and pathos. Maclaren's *Beside the Bonnie Briar Bush* had a sale of three-quarters of a million, and Crockett's *The Stuckiest Minister*, which was quickly followed by two more best-sellers, enabled Crockett to leave the ministry. Apart from a reasonable annoyance at having his market invaded, Barrie must have felt the complicated chagrin of a man who sees a fake article of his own invention successfully imitated. Later he was to have the same experience with *Peter Pan*; but if the public didn't mind who Peter Pandered to them, what could he do? Useless to warn them that his fakes were the only genuine ones; that was a nuance beyond their understanding.

He had, however, the satisfaction of leaving Scotland on Maclaren and Crockett's hands, after George Douglas had blown Scotch sentiment off the best-selling map in *The House with the Green Shutters*. By 1902 Barrie had two plays, neither on Scotch themes, running simultaneously, *Quality Street* and *The Admirable Crichton*. The first ran for fourteen months, the second for ten.

The mood of the prosperous classes in the decade of Barrie's stage triumphs was uncomfortable and apprehensive. The nineteenth century was over and they were waiting for the bill to be presented. The poor were dissatisfied, women were dissatisfied, and with each year it became more obvious that Germany was dissatisfied, too. It was no longer possible to dismiss unpleasant problems in the brusque Victorian fashion as 'matters better left undiscussed'. But there was room for someone who could lighten doubts and tremors with humour, or ease them into tears. This was Barrie's cue, though it must be admitted that in *The Admirable Crichton* he took risks which no skill less accomplished than his could have prevented from

wrecking the play as a popular success. Most people know the story. A yachtful of aristocrats is wrecked on a desert island, and the butler, Crichton, the only man among a number of males, takes charge, becomes the master of the island, and signifies his intention to make the earl's daughter his wife. The party is rescued, the butler steps down of his own free will from the autocracy he has enjoyed, and the play ends with him back in his old job. Among the men, apart from Crichton, there is not one who is not either an imbecile or a coward, or both. Yet the stalls followed this democratic manifesto without a murmur. Barrie, who is reported to have said that the stalls wouldn't stand an ending in which Crichton was still the master, knew that they would not identify themselves with the particular wasters on the stage, and that so long as the social system was turned the right way up again at the close they would find nothing to complain about. But to be on the safe side, he made Crichton himself rebuke the earl's daughter for saying that there must be something wrong with England, when the best man on an island had to be a servant at home. 'My lady, not even from you can I listen to a word against England.'

An additional safeguard was the relatively flattering picture of the aristocratic women. In Barrie, as in Shaw, the women have very much the best of it. Shaw's *Candida*, and Maggie in *What Every Woman Knows*, are the Edwardian wife as she liked to imagine herself, and as the Edwardian husband, sitting beside her in the stalls or dress circle, was willing, for the sake of domestic harmony, to concede her to be—no Victorian doll or angel in the house, but shrewd, humorous, realistic, infinitely tolerant of the vanities and follies of the big baby, her husband, always allowing him his own way, and always seeing to it that his way was hers also.

Another symptom of the age, one much nearer to the centre of Barrie's nature than any form of feminine or democratic aspiration, was the longing to escape, back to childhood or to any far off region, actual or imaginary, an island in the South Seas, a Wellsian Utopia, no matter what, so long as it was distant and different. In *Peter Pan* Barrie made his most successful, and, for the light it throws both on Barrie and his age, his most interesting contribution to this need. The play opens in a nursery in a London middle-class home. There are three children, the eldest being a girl, Wendy; there are the

father and mother, Mr. and Mrs. Darling; and there is a nurse, who is a Newfoundland dog. Peter Pan, a kind of changeling, arrives from The Never-Never Land, an island with a lagoon where mermaids bask. He spirits the children away to this island, there are adventures with a gang of pirates, who are finally massacred by Peter Pan and his devoted band, and the play ends with the return of the children to their London home, where Mr. Darling has taken up his quarters permanently in the kennel of the Newfoundland dog. Mrs. Darling offers to adopt Peter Pan, but he refuses. 'I want always to be a little boy and to have fun,' he says.

It is a whimsical production, not only in the current sense, but in the original sense of arbitrary and capricious—a fantasy written by as well as about a spoilt child. Barrie had a dog he was fond of, so the nurse has to be a dog. At times, no doubt, he wished he could change places with his dog, so he puts Mr. Darling into a kennel. The play is on this level throughout; there is not a breath of fresh air, not a natural or beautiful moment in the whole concoction. Every effect is a stage effect, designed with the audience in mind, as in the notorious close of Act IV—'She says—she says she thinks she could get well again if children believed in fairies!' (*He rises and throws out his arms he knows not to whom, perhaps to the boys and girls of whom he is not one.*) 'Do you believe in fairies? Say quick that you believe! If you believe, clap your hands!'

Such was the fare offered to Edwardian children, and approved by Edwardian parents. A hundred years had passed since *The Fairchild Family* with its hell for spoilt children and its strict prudential morality. Surfeited with Mammon, the world was beginning to pine for Mars, without knowing it, at least in England. 'I want always to be a little boy and to have fun' sounded rather pretty and touching in 1904, and everyone was captivated by Peter's gallant duel with the pirate chief, and applauded the reeking swords of his boy followers. Since then there has been a plethora of little boys who want to have fun, and now even such an adult as Mr. Fairchild would be a relief after the Peter Pan of Berchtesgaden.

Wendy loves the fearless, fascinating Peter, but Peter cares only for himself. That Barrie saw himself as Peter, and was on the whole gratified by the sight, is clear throughout the play, but at the close the pretences beneath which he tries to

hide his bewilderment and unhappiness dissolve, though only for a moment Wendy tries to embrace Peter, and Peter draws back. 'It has something to do with the riddle of his being,' Barrie explains in a stage direction, and referring to Peter's earlier cry 'To die will be an awfully big adventure' continues, 'If he could get the hang of the thing his cry might become, "To live would be an awfully big adventure!" but he can never quite get the hang of it, and so no one is as gay as he.'

The taste for Barrie's Never-Never Lands lasted till the end of the first world war, and in *Dear Brutus* and *Mary Rose* he provided audiences which had found Mars no more satisfying than Mammon with other-worldly fare light enough for their state of acute spiritual dyspepsia. Meanwhile he was becoming increasingly wretched. For many years after *Peter Pan* his annual income was between thirty and forty thousand pounds, and as he saw more of the upper classes his feeling against them became transformed into an equally strong feeling in their favour. Having adopted the sons of an old friend, he sent them to Eton. 'Your great English public schools—I never feel myself a foreigner in England except when trying to understand them,' he said in a speech. '... I am like a dog looking up wistfully at its owner, wondering what that noble face means, or if it does have a meaning.' Each year, Mr. Mackail writes, he continued to expand 'his contacts with the big names in politics and any number of the more decorative names in society'; and when Lady Cynthia Asquith became his private secretary, it gave him, according to Mr. Mackail, enormous and lasting pleasure to think that his secretary was the daughter of an earl. There is a poignant comment on all this in his diary, when he was sixty-two—'It is as if long after writing "P. Pan" its true meaning came to me. Desperate attempts to grow up but can't.'

More than ten years after this entry, he tried with another *Peter Pan* to recapture the public favour he had now lost; but *The Boy David*, with Elisabeth Bergner as David, was not what the public needed at the close of December 1936. The Abdication had just taken place, the Crystal Palace was in ruins, the shadow of Hitler was rising behind the still formidable substance of Mussolini, and England was feeling in a very bad way. But though confused and uncertain about nearly everything, she most decidedly did not think she could get well again if children believed in fairies.

## BERNARD SHAW

IN his preface to *Immaturity*, and elsewhere, Beirnard Shaw has dramatized his childhood so as to take the sting out of it. But to become even relatively invulnerable is a long business; it was not until his middle teens that Shaw began to form a protective covering for himself, and many hours of his childhood, he told his biographer Hesketh Pearson, were spent in tears. Both his parents were Anglo-Irish and well connected, but his father, a kindly, humorous man, was shiftless, took to drink, and was ostracized by his own as well as by his wife's relations. A shabby-genteel existence, slowly deteriorating towards real poverty, was Shaw's first experience of the world; and the fear and hatred of poverty which it created in his mind were intensified by frequent visits to the Dublin slums, where his nurse had her relatives and friends. Meanwhile life at home was, in his own phrase, anarchical. The third and last child of his parents, Shaw was born when his mother was already completely disillusioned with her husband, and was turning for consolation not to her children but to music. 'It never occurred to her,' Shaw says, 'that other people, especially children, needed guidance or training, or that it mattered in the least what they ate or drank or what they did so long as they were not actively mischievous.' The estrangement between the parents reproduced itself in the children; Shaw and his two sisters lived their own lives, and in this household of five there was no intimacy between any of its members.

Mrs. Shaw went to a music-master called Lee to have her voice trained, and after a time Lee invited the family to share his house with him. For Shaw, as for his mother, music proved an escape from the dreariness of everyday life. In Lee's home he absorbed and could sing and whistle from end to end leading works by Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, and the other great composers. His sisters were musical, too, and the whole family, the father excepted, used to join together in song and so for the time being forget themselves and one another.

When Shaw was fifteen the home broke up. Lee went to London, presently followed by Mrs. Shaw, who had decided to teach singing. Her elder daughter accompanied her, her younger was in delicate health and was sent to a sanatorium, where she died. The father, driven to total abstinence by all these events, remained in Ireland, and Shaw became a junior clerk in an estate agent's office in Dublin. It was about this time that he saw and was profoundly impressed by Mephistopheles in Gounod's *Faust*. Lee had bought a cottage for Mrs. Shaw on Dalkey Hill, overlooking Dublin Bay. Wandering on the hills above the bay or bathing in the sea was, with music, Shaw's chief happiness during these years. After seeing *Faust* he decorated his room in the cottage with drawings of Mephistopheles, and began to model himself on that detached and invulnerable spectator of the human scene. But he had his witty, sceptical, broken-down father before him as an object-lesson in how not to detach oneself from life. The cynicism of failure disgusted him, and in *John Bull's Other Island* he describes it, through his mouthpiece Larry Doyle, as a peculiarly Irish characteristic—'And all the time you laugh, laugh, laugh! eternal derision, eternal envy, eternal folly, eternal fouling and staining and degrading. . . .' The detachment of Mephistopheles was combined with energy, with an active manipulation of men and events, and it was this kind of detachment that Shaw aimed at and achieved.

When he was twenty he left Ireland and joined his mother in London. Ireland represented to him his dreams and his affections—the world which he had entered through music and looked down upon from Dalkey Hill, the emotions which had been wounded in his early years and which he was resolved not to expose to further hurt. England represented all the possibilities, including money and fame, realizable through energy and will. The two aspects of his nature symbolized by Ireland and England respectively seemed to him irreconcilable. He had felt in Ireland, he would act in England. In *John Bull's Other Island* he has revealed the internal conflict of this period through Larry Doyle, a civil engineer whose partner is a jovial, eupeptic Englishman, Thomas Broadbent. Attempting to explain Ireland and himself to the thick-witted Broadbent, he cries: 'You've no such colours in the sky, no such lure in the distances, no such sadness in the evenings. Oh, the dreaming! the dreaming! the torturing, heart-scalding,



never satisfying dreaming! dreaming, dreaming, dreaming! . . . An Irishman's imagination never lets him alone, never convinces him, never satisfies him, but it makes him that he can't face reality nor deal with it nor handle it nor conquer it.' It is, he continues, by living with Broadbent and working with him in double harness that he has learnt to live in a real world and not in an imaginary one. 'You will admit,' he says, 'that all my friends are either Englishmen or men of the big world that belongs to the big Powers.'

By splitting life up into the external world, which was real, and the internal world, which was unreal, Shaw committed himself from the beginning of his career to looking for the kingdom of heaven outside himself. The passion with which he applied himself to social problems was the measure of his misery as a child. If his mother had looked after him he would have been happy—this was his unconscious thought—and if the state looked after its members they would be happy, for suffering came from without, not from within, was the product of poverty and insecurity and would cease when they were abolished. Meanwhile, pending the establishment of a Socialist Utopia—and this was a refrain which ran through all his work and no doubt helped many to bear with complacency his invective against existing conditions—only the rich could lead lives worth living. Undershaft, the armaments manufacturer in *Major Barbara*, tells his daughter, who has been working among the poor, that he has saved her soul by providing her with a private income. Poverty, he says, is the worst of crimes, and the seven deadly sins are food, clothing, firing, rent, taxes, respectability, and children—'Nothing can lift those seven millstones from Man's neck but money; and the spirit cannot soar until the millstones are lifted.' *Pygmalion* enforces the same moral. In the old legend a statue is transformed into a living woman. In Shaw's play a flower-girl is transformed into a lady; and in a postscript Shaw adduces Nell Gwynne as proof that such a transfiguration, as he calls it, is possible, but does not take into account that its drawbacks might overbalance its advantages, or indeed that it could have any drawbacks at all. The spell of money on his imagination is still more strikingly revealed in *The Doctor's Dilemma*. Here are assembled a number of Harley Street specialists, none of them, according to Shaw, worth more than £250 a year at the outside and none of them receiving less than five thousand from a

gullible public. Over against them stands Louis Dubedat, a painter, according to Shaw, of genius, who by various devices squeezes enough cash out of the world to produce a number of masterpieces before he gives up the struggle and expires in the penultimate act. Yet, poverty being the greatest of crimes and wealth, consequently, the greatest of virtues, the villain of the piece is Dubedat, mean, callous, and treacherous; the heroes are the doctors, whose faults are of the head not of the heart, and whose prosperity seems therefore to proceed from God's kindness to innocence, not from man's susceptibility to bluff.

Louis Dubedat is Shaw's conception of what Larry Doyle would have been if he had remained with his dreams in Ireland instead of joining up with Broadbent in the real world. But was it, after all, the real world? That is the question-mark dotted all over the world of Broadbent by Shaw's irrepressible and enchanting humour, the faculty through which his soul continued to breathe. Having split himself into two and labelled one half real, the other half unreal, he could never free himself from the impulse to change the labels over. Louis Dubedat dies proclaiming the unreality of the world in which he had lied and swindled and his faith in the redemption of things by Beauty everlasting. This was effective theatrically, for it confirmed the Broadbents in the stalls in the belief that, not being artistic, they must be honest, and filled them at the same time with a magnanimous tolerance for the misconduct necessarily attached to the practice of art. But it was also a sincere expression of Shaw's intermittent revulsion against reality as understood by Broadbent, or even by Sidney Webb.

The goal which Shaw reached as a result of suppressing his feelings, of treating the imagination as an escape from reality not as a means of apprehending it, and of looking for the kingdom of heaven anywhere except within himself, is revealed in *Back to Methuselah*. Men must live longer, is his final conclusion. At fifty or sixty a man does not know enough to organize life properly. If he could get to three or four hundred he would be reasonably well equipped for the job. Perhaps, if he was Bernard Shaw. If he was Hitler, the longer and more elaborate his training the worse for the world. The last part of the play is called 'As Far as Thought can Reach'. It is not very far; for thought is merely the formulation of feeling, and where feeling has been stifled thought has little to work on. 'The day will come when there will be no people,

only thought,' mumbles the Struldbrug in whom Shaw has embodied his conception of what man will eventually be. This is the forlorn gospel of a soul languishing in time, as 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God' is the revelation of a spirit living in eternity.

## 6

## SHAW AND DICKENS

BERNARD SHAW's introduction to *Great Expectations*, which has just been issued in The Novel Library, was written in 1936 for a special American edition. I read the original introduction and cannot detect any changes of opinion in the present one, or even, to use Shaw's phrase in his preface to the amended version of Frank Harris's *Oscar Wilde*, any 'facts brought up to date'—a kind of fact which has of late flourished abundantly in Russia and so would have a particular attraction for Shaw. One must, therefore, assume that what he wrote ten years ago about and around *Great Expectations* still satisfies him in all particulars.

Dickens was Shaw's favourite author in his early years, and, much though he deplores Dickens's lack of any philosophy, religious or political, is still the writer to whom he feels most drawn. They have, indeed, much in common. Both were unhappy in childhood, and neither in later life could have too much attention and applause to make up for his early neglect. Each treated the world less as a meeting-place with other human beings than as a stage on which he was playing the chief part, what Shaw says of Dickens being equally true of himself—'his outward life (was) a feat of acting from beginning to end'. In each the outward life, the carefully constructed image presented to the public, consumed the inward life, replacing natural feelings with rhetoric, false sentiment, and an appetite for violence, expressed by Dickens in melodrama, by Shaw in his panegyrics of the dictators, preluded by his Hitlerian enthusiasm for the Salvation Army's flag of Blood and Fire—'Fire is beautiful and blood a vital and splendid red.' Both, having dropped a curtain between their real selves and the world, stopped on the world's side of the curtain, and refusing to examine themselves were precluded from any deep understanding of others. But both, though neither was a great humorist, which implies a comparatively harmonized nature, had a marvellous comic genius, Dickens's the more thrilling and poetic, Shaw's the more brilliant and intellectual, each unique.

The chief and immense difference between them was in intensity of feeling. Dickens would have loved others if he could. Apart from his marriage, a raid on happiness followed by a long and wretched captivity, he experienced many brief wild adorations, which expressed his longing to break out of his isolation, throw up his part, and become a human being. Though his roots were inextricably tangled, they went deep into the ground; he felt life as an individual, and aspired to be a living man, not a cog in a state machine. Shaw, of course, had no more desire or intention than Dickens to be a cog in any machine. But the little appeal other human beings possessed for him was stunted in childhood and his roots did not go deep anywhere, for he was an Anglo-Irishman, repelled by the shuffleness of his native country and exasperated while strongly attracted by the wealth and power of England. Rootless, ambitious, indifferent to individuals, and with a strong bent towards regimentation sharpened by the disorder of his early years, he gravitated to socialism as naturally as Dickens to radicalism, finding in the growing collectivism of the age a religion which placed his distaste for personal relations in a flattering light, while opening up to his union of practical finesse and dramatic genius all those gratifications which, when enjoyed by an individualist, are supposed to denote insensibility to the common weal.

This attempt to suggest the main points of likeness and unlikeness between Dickens and Shaw diverges a good deal from the similar attempt in Shaw's preface to *Great Expectations*. To Shaw Dickens is a John the Baptist, who did as well as he could within the inevitable limitations of a forerunner. Dickens, says Shaw, was a revolutionist without knowing it. From the Eatanswill election in *Pickwick* to the Veneering election in *Our Mutual Friend* he poured unceasing contempt on Parliament; and *Little Dorrit*, with its satire of the Civil Service, was a more seditious book than *Das Kapital*.

It is just possible that a man might be a revolutionist without knowing it, but if no one else knows it either, if his sticks of dynamite pass for Christmas crackers and a roar of laughter goes up when he wheels his guillotine forward, what then? It is true that a humorist may hasten changes; F. Anstey's *Vice Versa*, for example, had a great effect on Victorian family life. But humour works on the individual,

it is a solvent from within. Revolution is a collective act, a destroyer from without, a rearranger of greed and fatuity in new and usually even less attractive patterns. It is his spectacular power-loving temperament, with its accompanying indifference to invisible processes, which led Shaw to dramatize Dickens's popular and well-remunerated comedy at the expense of established institutions as subversive material of the same order as Marx's *Kapital*. On the parliamentary point (he accordingly writes) Dickens was as much the prophet of the Fascist and Communist revolutions as Marx was the economic prophet of the Soviets; though he goes on to say, rather pensively, that neither the Fascist nor the Communist leaders made any mention of Dickens when they 'swept the great parliamentary sham into the dustbin'. Having established Dickens as a revolutionist unconscious of being one, with followers unaware of his existence, Shaw points out his shortcomings as a political Messiah. He was uneducated and (though better no schooling at all than the schooling of Rudyard Kipling and Winston Churchill) might, being a mentally acquisitive boy, have attended to his own education, like Shaw, who in his early years gained an extensive knowledge of music and painting, and devoured books on science and current religious controversies. Dickens, on the other hand, read Smollett, a grosser barbarian than himself, and *Don Quixote* and *The Arabian Nights*, which, while they stimulated his imagination, left him quite in the dark as to the art and philosophy of his day. As a man he never went to classical concerts, and although Rossetti, Morris, and Ruskin were Dickens worshippers, Dickens was completely indifferent to contemporary art. Metaphysics meant as little to him as painting and music, and science as social reform, outside the grievances he discovered and exposed himself. In short, he had no culture and no religion. Until he read Carlyle he was a cheery middle-class optimist, but when Carlyle destroyed his belief in bourgeois society, and with it his lightness of heart, he had neither an economic Utopia nor a credible religion to hitch on to. 'His world became a world of great expectations cruelly disappointed. The Wells world is a world of greater and greater expectations continually being fulfilled. This is a huge improvement.'

It did not seem so to Wells at the close of his life, when the crescendo of expectations continually fulfilling themselves

burst in the atom bomb, and he declared that mind was at the end of its tether, that the universe was finished, and there was no way out or around or through. Wells, like Shaw and Kipling, Lenin and Mussolini and Hitler, had shifted the centre of gravity from the individual to the state. Economic Utopias, credible religions, he had tried the lot, and in the end, surveying what the collectivists had done to the world, found it less painful to write the universe off as an unsuccessful experiment than to recast his philosophy and explore the soul he had denied for the kingdom of heaven which he had sought wherever it was not to be found. Dickens, too, was wretched at the close, with his stronger nature far more deeply so than Wells. But not having the illusion of omniscience bred in those who try to fill their emptiness with facts, he did not suppose that he had accumulated the necessary evidence to bring in a verdict against the universe. He simply felt that he had missed the happiness he had once hoped to find in life—a banal conclusion compared either with Wells's conclusion that happiness is a co-operative product for which, it seems, the requisite machinery cannot be constructed, or with Shaw's conclusion that happiness is a co-operative product for which, judging by Wells's mounting exultation, the requisite machinery is already in good running order.

## THE INTELLIGENT MAN'S GUIDE TO OSCAR WILDE

BERNARD SHAW's attempt to persuade the world that Frank Harris's *Oscar Wilde* is the authoritative work on Wilde, the book by which Wilde's memory must stand or fall, is as strange a story as literary history contains.

Frank Harris was writing his book on Wilde round about 1910, and when I met him in the autumn of 1911 he showed it to me in manuscript. Having been attracted to Harris by his book on Shakespeare, I was rather taken aback that he should have devoted a book to Wilde. The subject seemed to me unworthy of him, and there was a moment during which I wondered if he had written it for money. This fantastic idea was dispelled by his deep and earnest tones as he held the manuscript towards me—'Take it and read it,' he boomed, 'and let me have your full mind on it. It may help me, and will at least give me a deeper knowledge of you.' Opening the manuscript, he pointed to the aphorism which stood at the beginning of the book, and indeed still stands there, having survived the many excisions, modifications and after-thoughts which have ravaged this authoritative work in the course of the last twenty-seven years. 'The Crucifixion of the Guilty,' he read out, 'is still more awe-inspiring than the crucifixion of the innocent; what do we men know of innocence?' 'Does that say anything to you?' he asked. 'It holds the spirit in which I have written, and in which a few, perhaps, will read.'

The aphorism did not say anything very intelligible to me, but there was a cavernous majesty about it as intoned by Harris which subdued me to the proper mood for reading the manuscript. The book impressed me deeply. First of all, there was the bold challenge to English hypocrisy in the realistic treatment of sex. The opening chapter, which introduces the reader to Wilde's parents, is entirely filled with the details of a suit brought by a girl who accused Wilde's father of first drugging and then seducing her. The middle of the book is given up to the two trials of Oscar Wilde, and draws profusely



on the law reports of these trials. The close of the book is largely concerned with Wilde's seduction of a youthful conscript in Paris, set off by long talks with Harris, in which Wilde is lyrical about the delights of homosexuality, hints that he is beginning to like his pleasures seasoned with cruelty, and expresses his repugnance to normal sex in a diatribe on the disgust inspired in him by his wife when pregnant.

The structure raised on this foundation seemed to me full of pity and terror—the man of genius crucified by English middle-class hatred and envy; the sinister young aristocrat, Lord Alfred Douglas, hounding and re-hounding his friend to his doom; and, rising above this welter of weakness and wickedness, Greatheart Harris, dazed when Wilde first confesses his guilt, but infinitely generous and compassionate to his fallen friend, and ready to brave all Philistia in his aid, though a little impatient at the, to him, incredible absence of any fighting spirit in the gifted but feeble Oscar.

Frank Harris's treatment of Douglas made publication of the book in the ordinary way impossible, so he decided to bring it out privately. In spite of the aphorism quoted above, he knew a great deal about innocence, and persuaded a friend who had a small bookshop to guarantee the cost of setting the MS. up in type. Various complications, including a month in Brixton gaol, interfered with Harris's plans, and the book did not start its career in England. Shortly after the outbreak of the war, Harris sailed for the States, carrying the sheets of the book with him, and leaving his friend to settle with the printers out of the proceeds on the forced sale of his shop.

In 1916 Harris published *Oscar Wilde* in America, and sent a number of copies to Hesketh Pearson, who in the ardour of youth did not expect to meet with any difficulty in carrying out Harris's request that he would interest the leading English writers in the book. Having sent copies to Arnold Bennett, Joseph Conrad, James Barrie, H. G. Wells, Edmund Gosse and Rudyard Kipling, Pearson awaited their replies, which were either in the first person and bitter, or in the third person and brief. The only gleam of light in the literary landscape was Bernard Shaw, who wrote Harris a long letter on Wilde for insertion in his next edition, and asked Pearson round for a 'chat on Frank'.

It was in this letter that Shaw said Wilde's memory must stand or fall by Harris's book, and, accepting Harris's facts,

characterized Wilde in his last years as 'an unproductive drunkard and swindler'. Yet in his talk with Pearson, immediately after this letter, Shaw, referring to some sketches by Harris of himself and other English writers, said: 'He is really a frightful liar, writing imaginary conversations in an imaginary character, with odd little bits of actual reminiscence in them.' So at the outset of Shaw's connexion with Harris's *Wilde*, we are in the presence of the still unsolved problem why Shaw should consider Harris an unimpeachable authority on Wilde, but a frightful liar about everyone else.

In 1918 Harris reissued his *Wilde* with Shaw's letter, which gave it a large sale in the States, and later in France and Germany. The thought that if only he had taken a different view of Alfred Douglas the book would be having an equally large sale in England preyed increasingly on his mind, and in 1925 he approached Douglas and offered to withdraw all the misstatements about him, and reissue the book in its purged form with a preface setting forth how he had been deceived by the malicious misrepresentations of Wilde and Robert Ross. Douglas agreed, and Harris wrote a preface in which he said that the whole story showed what an elusive goddess Truth was, since she had succeeded in eluding someone so sincere and scrupulous as himself. After the preface had been written, Harris jibbed over the correction of the misstatements, Douglas refused to lift the ban, and Harris wrote what he called a Final Preface, in which he withdrew his withdrawal, and reinstated Douglas as the villain in the Wilde drama.

Harris died in 1931. Although my belief in him as a great and good man had perished while I was still in the early twenties, my interest in him as an extraordinary character remained, and I wrote a life of him which was published in the spring of 1932. Harris wanted to be everything, a Shakespeare, a Caesar, a Christ, a millionaire, a great lover, an athlete, an aesthete, an Adonis, an anarchist, an anchorite and an Old Etonian. The natural result was that he did not succeed at all in most of these parts, or conspicuously in any of them. As he would neither abandon his ambitions, nor admit that he had failed to achieve them, he adjusted what was to what should have been by romancing on a scale which can never have been surpassed, and which Casanova alone, of liars I am acquainted with, has come anywhere near equalling.

Beneath the high sentiments adorning his *Oscar Wilde* and his other biographies, there was a savage bitterness which he tried to appease with inventions designed to glorify himself and to belittle everyone who had hurt his vanity, either directly or merely by being superior to him in virtue, intellect or any other form of human excellence.

Hearing from Wilde's oldest friend, Robert Harborough Sherard, a few months after my book appeared, that he had written a detailed exposure of Harris's *Wilde*, I asked to see the manuscript, which was published last year (1937) under the title *Bernard Shaw, Frank Harris and Oscar Wilde*, Shaw appearing in it as the person responsible for guaranteeing Harris's reliability. I suggested to Sherard, when I had finished the manuscript, that I should pass it on to Shaw, who could not fail to be convinced by it of his mistake in recommending Harris's book as the work by which Wilde's memory must stand or fall. Sherard consented, and I called on Shaw. I did not think Shaw would much mind withdrawing his endorsement of Harris's *Wilde*. The time for being generous to Harris was now over, and the time for being just to Wilde had arrived. As a public man Shaw, I recognized, would not seek occasions to withdraw his pronouncements, but in this instance he had simply to point out that since endorsing Harris's *Oscar Wilde*, he had been compelled to revise and in many places rewrite Harris's *Bernard Shaw*.

I made no headway at all with Shaw. He said that Harris's *Wilde* was far more interesting than the real Wilde, and when I replied that the point at issue was not the interest but the authenticity of Harris's *Wilde*, he diverged into memories of Wilde and Wilde's mother, both of whom seem to have filled him with considerable distaste. Reflecting after I left him on all he had said, I realized that he had a deeply rooted antipathy to Wilde, and a less deep but lively affection for Harris. Irishmen are seldom susceptible to one another's charm, and there were many reasons, some valid, why Shaw should not care for Wilde. His sentiment for Harris was also understandable. If Wilde was the hare in the race for fame, and Shaw the tortoise, Harris was a bull who had charged on to the course, killing a score of spectators, broken all records for the hundred yards, charged off again, and later been found dead in a ditch. A tortoise would be rather taken by a bull who behaved like that.

Shaw's aversion from Wilde and his affection for Harris did not, however, excuse his refusal to look at Sherard's manuscript. I concluded that he attached as much importance to a reputation for infallibility as the dictators whom he admired, and had not learnt from Dr. Johnson's Ignorance, Madam, pure ignorance' how tenderly the world feels towards anyone capable of admitting an error.

Sherard, having failed to find a publisher for his manuscript, set up a printing press in his Corsican lair, and presently issued a pamphlet in two parts, the second containing a combined attack on Shaw and Harris. The pamphlet attracted some attention in England, and when, a little later, Mr. Vincent O'Sullivan published a dispassionate unmelodramatic account of Wilde in his last years, the jacket of the book contained a tribute from Bernard Shaw, in which he implied that Mr. O'Sullivan's account would prove a very necessary corrective to Frank Harris's.

At last the manuscript of the indomitable Sherard appeared in book form, and was accepted everywhere as totally disposing of Harris's *Wilde*. Shaw's praise of Vincent O'Sullivan was the first step towards a full repudiation of Harris's caricature, and a letter to the papers, when Sherard's book came out, would have enabled him to complete the evacuation of a position which had become altogether untenable. But Napoleon would not resign himself to Elba, and Shaw, too, was resolved to have his Waterloo. In the July of 1938 Frank Harris's *Oscar Wilde* was published for the first time in England, with a preface of over forty pages by Shaw. Shaw began by saying that he had done his best to discourage the agitation against his endorsement of Harris's *Wilde* by ignoring it, and then at once went on to say that Mr. Sherard was too engaging an author to be ignored. It would be wearisome to follow him through his subsequent contradictions. All that clearly emerged from the preface was his determination not to recede from his position that Harris was not merely the best biographer of Wilde, but the custodian of Wilde's fame. More than ever, Shaw said, did he stick to his view that Wilde's memory would have to stand or fall by Harris's book. For the purpose of telling Wilde's story both artistically and sanely, Harris, said Shaw, was 'the noblest Roman of them all'.

In the present edition, Shaw explained, some of Harris's facts had been 'brought up to date', his strictures on Alfred

Douglas, due to imperfect sympathy and knowledge, had been omitted, and there were a few other emendations.

Shaw did not disclose who had made the emendations. Some of the emendations are in the first person, and these are presumably the corrections made by Harris in 1925, before his impatience got the better of his desire to placate Douglas. Others are in the style of Shaw, who neither here nor in Harris's *Bernard Shaw* has succeeded in blending his manner with Harris's. Occasionally there is an emendation which begins with Harris and goes on with Shaw: for example,

Oscar, I believe, died slowly and quietly in the modest hotel where he was treated with extraordinary kindness and forbearance by his landlord Dupoirier and Madame Dupoirier.

The tribute to the Dupoiriers is certainly a graceful borrowing by Shaw from Sherard, who is the chief source of such facts and facts-brought-up-to-date as Harris's lives of Wilde contain; but the 'slowly and quietly' is, I think, Harris's 1925 modification of the 'loud explosion' which preluded Wilde's death in the original edition.

The reception accorded to this authoritative hotch-potch was extremely hostile. Mr. Desmond MacCarthy suggested that the publishers should withdraw it, Mr. Harold Nicolson said that it ought never to have appeared, and while Shaw was treated with the consideration due to his age and past achievements, the noblest Roman of them all was pelted from all sides with what he would have described, borrowing for once from himself, as 'the mouldy cabbages of pedantry and the rotten eggs of envy'.

A greater or a lesser man would have given in at this stage, but Shaw attempted to defend himself in a letter to the *Sunday Times*. After saying that Harris was 'a curious and interesting character besides being a very amusing one', Shaw continued 'I have done my best to depict him as he really was, and to clear his essentially truthful narrative from the errors which affected the justice due to living persons'. This defence did not touch the fundamental point that Shaw had made no appreciable effort to perform the certainly stupendous task of clearing Harris's narrative of the errors which affected the justice due to Wilde.

The same number of the *Sunday Times* contained a paragraph from which it appeared that Shaw had not even succeeded in clearing the narrative of its errors about Douglas.

The publishers, one read, following a consultation with Lord Alfred Douglas, had agreed to issue no further copies of their first edition of Frank Harris's *Oscar Wilde*. A second edition was in preparation, from which seven pages of the first edition would be omitted, these pages containing Harris's account of an incident at Chantilly—the passage to which Lord Alfred took particular exception.

It was from anything but a desire to provoke Douglas that Shaw left these pages in. In his preface he had praised Lord Alfred's beauty, poetic genius and critical insight. Lord Alfred, he said, had written the only understanding book on Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, and this was due to his being the Mr. W. H. of the *Sonnets* come back to life. In this book on the *Sonnets*, Douglas insists again and again that Mr. W. H. was not of noble birth, and it is therefore clear that Shaw had not read Douglas with much attention, or he would not have thrown out the suggestion that Lord Alfred was the plebeian Mr. W. H. redidivus. The truth which emerges throughout from Shaw's action over Harris's *Wilde*, and the best excuse that can be made for him, is that he does not read books with much attention. He enjoys rhetoric and is impressed by force, and if there are force and rhetoric in a book, and Harris's *Wilde* is full of both, Shaw is satisfied. The Chantilly episode, which Shaw presumably thought both sane and artistic and to which Douglas most reasonably took exception, represents Wilde as a kind of knockabout King Lear reeling between Harris-Kent and Douglas-Regan.

In his letter to the *Sunday Times*, which was in reply to Mr. Desmond MacCarthy's review, Shaw said that Mr. MacCarthy might feel a little for Mrs. Frank Harris, left with no property except Harris's copyrights. It was largely out of sympathy for Mrs. Harris that Shaw submitted to having his life written by Harris; but there is an obvious difference between helping Mrs. Harris at his own expense and at Wilde's.

It is unlikely that the second (English) edition of Harris's *Wilde* will attract many purchasers. There is not much money in putting Baron Münchhausen under a cherry-tree with an axe and calling him George Washington. What Shaw has overlooked are the possibilities of Harris as Harris. The best way in which he can serve the Harris estate is by extracting the most striking episodes in Harris's *Contemporary Portraits* and his autobiography, and publishing them with illustrations by

the leading cartoonists of the day, beginning with Max Beer-bohm, who knew and appreciated Harris. Among the drawings I should be glad to see in this volume are Harris as a new boy at Eton; Harris and Skobeleff storming Plevna; Harris consoling Carlyle for his failure to consummate his marriage with Mrs. Carlyle, Harris refusing money from Cecil Rhodes; Froude and Lecky in the porch of Westminster Abbey at the funeral of Robert Browning dissociating themselves from Harris's views on prostitution, Ruskin failing to make it clear to Harris whether he watched by the bed of the dying Rose La Touche or got into it; Maupassant succeeding in making it clear to Harris that he stood well with the opposite sex; Lord Roberts confirming Harris's low estimate of Lord Kitchener; Harris helping a muzzy Walter Pater into a hansom cab; Harris walking by the side of a weeping Thomas Huxley, Harris wishing godspeed to Trotsky in New York; and Harris telling the exact truth to President Kruger in Pretoria.

## OSCAR WILDE'S BIOGRAPHERS

A MAN'S true character is not easily or quickly disengaged from the memorials raised to him by his friends who, being drawn to him by his weaknesses as well as by his merits, are tempted to celebrate his pretensions, which usually are also theirs, rather than his virtues, which are more peculiar to himself. It was the self-love and self-righteousness of Dickens which saddled him with Forster. It was the pawky conceit of Carlyle which sought through his nephew Alexander, supported by a host of late Victorian humbugs, to obliterate the truthful testimony of Froude, who embodied what was genuine in Carlyle. And though Boswell's natural and lifelike portrait witnesses to Johnson's profound sincerity, the vicarious delight that Boswell took in Johnson's ascendancy over his company in some degree distorted the true proportions of his subject, so that it is only of late years that the deeper elements in Johnson's nature have begun to show through the lineaments of Boswell's conversational gladiator.

Oscar Wilde, whose chief weakness was a mania for dramatizing himself and watching the effect on others, inevitably attracted excessively vain people, and was therefore bound to provoke some very peculiar feats of the commemorative kind. The three chief memorialists of Wilde in the forty years after his death were Lord Alfred Douglas, Frank Harris, and Robert Harborough Sherard, with Bernard Shaw and Robert Ross in the background, abetting this Boswell or discrediting that for tactical purposes of their own. Sherard was exceptionally well read and well informed and strikingly handsome. When in his early twenties he met Wilde, he saw before him a man, not much older than himself, who was already raised high above the throng of writers aspiring towards fame and slipping backwards towards journalism, among whom, as he must have been obscurely aware, it was his destiny to remain. The attraction of Wilde for Sherard was immediate and lasting. The attraction of Sherard for Wilde was slight and transient. For a time they shared rooms in Charles Street, but Sherard could not keep pace with Wilde, and faded gloomily into the



background of his life, emerging for a short space during the catastrophe of 1895 as one of Wilde's would-be saviours, and then fading out once more. Soon after Wilde's death, at a time when those whose careers were still in the making had more profitable themes to write about, Sherard produced a little book on Wilde which lacked actuality, Sherard figuring in it as an innocent and beautiful youth whose inherited Puritanism had estranged his weak though wonderful friend; so they had gone their several ways, not to meet again till near the end, when they could but signal mutely to one another, like wrecked ships going down in the engulfing waves. Two or three years after this elegiac fantasy, the taboo on Wilde's name being now virtually over, Sherard published his *Life of Wilde*, in which he continued to be unreal about Wilde but, possibly owing to his Puritan streak, attained a considerable measure of accuracy in his facts. Four years later, in 1910, Frank Harris wrote the first draft of his *Life and Confessions of Oscar Wilde*, which after many vicissitudes appeared in the States in 1918, with notes by Robert Ross and an appendix by Bernard Shaw. Wilde for Sherard was the one means by which he could perpetuate his own memory. The relation of Harris to Wilde was much more complicated. He admired and envied Wilde's social charm and his genius as a talker; and he cultivated him for a time after his downfall in the hope that he would pull himself together and, with Harris's assistance and counsel, exploit the notoriety prison had conferred on him. Wilde disappointed this hope; but by 1910 he was being widely read in England and still more widely on the Continent, and Harris perceived that the time had come to blend tragedy and pornography in a whole which would appeal to all tastes. The confessions referred to in the title are a far from platonic and entirely imaginary dialogue in which Wilde and Harris discuss sexual pleasure from their differing standpoints. This dialogue, together with detailed accounts of Wilde's trial and also of the trial in which Wilde's father defended himself against a charge of rape, supplied the pornography. Wilde's fall from the highest pinnacle of worldly triumph supplied the tragedy, in which Alfred Douglas played the part of Judas Iscariot and Harris appeared from time to time as a strong and faithful friend whose powerful activities in many fields necessitated long absences from the fretful and failing Wilde—hence his pitiful and untimely end.

The trials apart, verbatim reports of which Harris appears to have put himself or someone else to the trouble of acquiring, the dependable facts in the book are, with a few trifling exceptions, transferred wholesale from Sherard's biography. Nevertheless, it suited Robert Ross, who wished Douglas ill, and Bernard Shaw, who did not wish Wilde well, to approve as a true account of Wilde's life this curious medley of looted facts and home-made lies, seasoned with transpontine melodrama and diluted with crocodile tears. In casting Alfred Douglas as Judas Iscariot, Harris was, as usual, obeying a number of impulses. He was on bad terms with Douglas at the time, he had a taste for Judases, and was indeed abundantly provided with them among his own disciples; and he was anxious to oblige Robert Ross, who had for many years been quietly establishing the tradition that Wilde's St. John was Ross and his Iscariot Douglas. Sherard, allusively and without naming anyone, had incorporated this tradition in his biography, and now Harris was roaring it across the Atlantic.

So it is no matter for surprise that Douglas's books on Wilde, his lawsuits with Robert Ross and others, his travels by land and sea for the purpose of vindicating himself and destroying his enemies, did not, in their total effect, illumine Wilde with the radiance of a detached delight in his genius and a disinterested appreciation of his character. It was natural that Douglas's chief concern should be with substituting himself for Robert Ross as the Beloved Disciple and Ross for himself as Judas Iscariot—substitutions which Sherard eventually accepted out of conviction, and which Harris would have accepted if Douglas had agreed to his terms. But had Douglas's devotion to Wilde been more than a form of self-devotion, he would not have confined himself in the hundreds of pages dealing with their friendship to a few paragraphs on Wilde's charm, an occasional reiteration of the love he felt for him, and some moving lines lamenting the loss of his companionship. The central figure on Douglas's stage is not the Master but the Beloved Disciple. Once Douglas sets his foot on Calvary there is no standing-room there for anyone else; and among all the falsetto Christs begotten in the last hundred years by vanity on false sentiment the most fantastic is the spoilt child who apostrophized himself in a line which rates Christ's sufferings far below his own—'O thrice betrayed and seven times crucified.'

Such are the chief contributions to the biography of Wilde between his death and the recent appearance of Hesketh Pearson's *Life*. To call it the best of the Wilde biographies is, after what I have said about its predecessors, rather like calling the Catholic saint, Francis Borgia, the holiest of the Borgias. In any case, the public is apt to consider praise of a friend's book rather as a tax on friendship than as a spontaneous tribute, so I shall limit myself to echoing W. J. Turner's verdict that it is a very good book, and to summarizing briefly the impression it conveys of Wilde's character and genius.

Hesketh Pearson suppresses none of the weak elements in Wilde's curiously divided nature. Homosexuality, which aims at duplicating the self instead of complementing it, is the natural outlet of exaggerated self-love, and an intense self-preoccupation, with its accompanying passion for the applause of others, was the limiting and in the end the destroying element in the character of Wilde. Entangled with this destructive force was a charm rooted in a profound sympathy which in some of its manifestations revealed, as two episodes given by Hesketh Pearson show, the possession of healing powers such as one expects to find only in a saint. The obverse of sympathy is understanding, and Wilde's insight into reality expressed itself, as in all naturally happy persons, in humour. It was the penalty of his divided nature that he was often callous and that his humour was often artificial, but as his sympathy when liberated was magical in its effects, so his humour in his freer moments was a spell which dissolved all the cares and vanities of ordinary existence. This book, the material of which has been assembled during nearly forty years, gives at last a fair and full picture of one of the most extraordinary and, potentially, one of the most gifted men in history.

## RUPERT BROOKE

*The Collected Poems of Rupert Brooke*, with a memoir by Sir Edward Marsh, appeared in 1918. Since then the public demand for Brooke's verse has remained constant, and the literary trustees appointed by his mother feel that he may now be 'accepted as a national possession', in the words of Mr. Geoffrey Keynes, who has accordingly brought out a new and enlarged edition of his poems. Although Mr. Keynes does not claim much for the early pieces he has resurrected, they were worth including as evidence of Brooke's natural gift for verse and early attraction towards a belief in a state of felicity

Where, the quest over, sin and bondage past,  
Men shall be gods, and every vision true,  
And Time Eternity.

Mr. Keynes, who was at Rugby with Brooke, says very little about him in his brief preface, and Sir Edward Marsh's memoir therefore remains our chief source of information about Brooke's life. Born in August 1887, at Rugby, where his father was a master, Rupert Brooke was in his father's house, of which in his last year he became the head. His happiness at Rugby—radiant enough, as pictured by Sir Edward, to have provoked comment in Eden before the Fall—was doubtless considerable. He was successful both in games and work, his charm and unusual good looks were of the kind which are at their height in the late teens and early twenties, and the fact that he was in his father's house, which would have handicapped most boys, proved an asset to someone so innately adapted as Brooke to protected and privileged positions.

His first year at King's was, Sir Edward says, rather unsatisfactory. 'He thought it right,' as Sir Edward puts it, 'to live entirely for things of the mind' and accordingly sank into great despondency, writing during his first long vacation: 'I'm filled with an hysterical despair to think of fifty years more. I hate myself and everyone. . . . Go back to Cambridge for my second year and laugh and talk with those old dull people on that airless plain! The thought fills me with

you say about friends; but oh dear people! it *is* fun going away and making thousands of acquaintances.'

Between Cambridge, where he took his degree in 1909, and the outbreak of war in 1914 Rupert Brooke became known, Sir Edward says, 'among a large and varied circle of interesting friends as a man of exceptional promise and charm—"a creature", as was written of him by Henry James, "on whom the gods had smiled their brightest".' The circle of friends included, Sir Edward tells us, Henry James, W. B. Yeats, John Masefield, Edmund Gosse, Walter de la Mare, John Drinkwater, the Asquith family, and George Wyndham; and in the background, drab but useful, there were the editors glanced at when Brooke wrote to his mother that he had ceased to have any fear about making a living, for there were so many papers that would print anything he liked to send them. 'Rupert's public form,' a friend at King's once remarked, 'is the youthful poet, the real foundation of his character is a hard business faculty.'

Before settling down to his career, or else as part of it, Brooke started for the South Seas in May 1913, from time to time sending back to civilization such messages as this, in a letter to Miss Violet Asquith: 'I suppose you're rushing from lunch-party to lunch-party, and dance to dance, and opera to political platform. Won't you come and learn how to make a hibiscus wreath for your hair, and sail a canoe, and swim two minutes under water catching turtles, and dive forty feet into a waterfall, and climb a cocoa-nut palm? It's more worth while.'

The war, which opened a few weeks after his return to England, seemed to promise a release from make-believe and factitious enthusiasms:

Now God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour  
And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping. . . .  
Leave the sick hearts that honour could not move,  
And half-men, and their dirty songs and dreary,  
And all the little emptiness of love!

This and the four other sonnets he wrote in camp during the first winter of the war magnificently expressed what the papers and politicians of that time were expressing less magnificently. More than this cannot be said in their favour. The antithesis between war and peace is a good theme for rhetoric at either end of a war, but Brooke, had he not died of blood-poisoning

before reaching Gallipoli, would soon have felt the stimulus of action ebbing, and vacancy enclosing him again, a change foreshadowed in his last poem, in which he sees his fellow-officers on board as

Perishing things and strange ghosts—soon to die  
To other ghosts—this one, or that, or I

There is much that is charming and graceful in Brooke's verse, very little that is self-forgetful. But it would be too sanguine to suggest that only poets who forget themselves are remembered by posterity, and it is very probable that there will always be more readers for the War Sonnets and for

I have been so great a lover filled my days  
So proudly with the splendour of Love's praise

than for the poem which pictures heaven as imagined by a fish and the sonnet

Not with vain tears, when we're beyond the sun.

# IO

## OCCLUDED PASTURES

THIS volume<sup>1</sup> takes its title from the second of the two dramatic pieces it contains, perhaps because 'For the Time Being' aims higher than 'The Sea and the Mirror', being transcendental in intention and ending on a note of joyful acceptance which might be convincing if anything in the poem had led up to it. The vein of genius which runs through Mr. Auden's work is richer in the first piece than in the second. Two quotations will show its nature, one from some verses spoken by Trinculo, the other from a speech delivered by Caliban.

The characters in 'The Sea and the Mirror', which has for its sub-title 'A Commentary on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*', are Shakespeare's characters reinterpreted by Mr. Auden, a legitimate device used also by Shakespeare in his borrowings from other writers. In *The Tempest* Trinculo is a brutish clown designed to amuse the pit and help the story along. Auden's Trinculo is a poet whose imagination has lifted him into the clouds out of the world in which once he felt secure and at home.

Mechanic, merchant, king,  
Are warmed by the cold clown  
Whose head is in the clouds  
And never can get down . . .

On clear days I can see  
Green acres far below,  
And the red roof where I  
Was little Trinculo.

There lies that solid world  
These hands can never reach;  
My history, my love,  
Is but a choice of speech. . . .

This longing for the world of childhood is expressed by Caliban too: 'Give me my passage home, let me see that harbour once again just as it was before I learned the bad words. Patriarchs wiser than Abraham mended their nets on

<sup>1</sup> *For the Time Being*. By W. H. Auden.

the modest wharf; white and wonderful beings undressed on the sand-dunes; sunset glittered on the plate-glass windows of the Marine Biological Station, far off on the extreme horizon a whale spouted. Look, Uncle, look. They have broken my glasses and I have lost my silver whistle. Pick me up, Uncle, let little Johnny ride away on your massive shoulders to recover his green kingdom, where the steam-rollers are as friendly as the farm dogs. . . .'

There are exquisite touches in these two passages, which express the nostalgia for childhood as poignantly as anything in Hans Andersen or *David Copperfield*. Yet beautiful though the fruits of this nostalgia are, it is a limiting emotion which, in spite of a surface likeness, differs profoundly from the way in which Wordsworth or Traherne recollected his childhood. For Traherne and Wordsworth the first years of life were spent not in paradise, but in sight of it: 'Something infinite behind everything appeared: which talked with my expectation and moved my desire.' There is a hint of this feeling in Auden's 'white and wonderful beings', but essentially childhood is for him, as it was for Dickens and Andersen, a lost Eden, a state not of promise but of possession, not of expectancy but of enjoyment. It is true that his intelligence, much more sophisticated than Dickens's or Andersen's, tells him that this is an illusion, for he makes Caliban speak of the Eden which memory 'falsely conceives of as the ultimately liberal condition'. But emotionally he believes in this lost Eden, 'that solid world these hands can never reach'. Life is for him a journey away from Eden, not towards it, a retreat into an always deeper isolation and an increasingly intensified self-consciousness.

Self-consciousness, with its feeling, partly complacent, partly self-pitying, of difference from others, is strongest in adolescence, and Auden, though now in the late thirties, is still adolescent. He uses his imagination not to unite him to life, but to isolate him from it, dramatizing himself, according to his mood, as a lost and lonely figure, like Trinculo, or a forlornly knowing and devil-may-care one, like Caliban, or even as a—what? How characterize Antonio, whom Auden invests with an occult significance and a secret superiority to the others for which Shakespeare has in no way prepared us? In *The Tempest* Antonio is a villain who has dispossessed his brother Prospero of his dukedom and, after being bewitched



and plagued on Prospero's magic island, is cursorily and contemptuously pardoned by his injured brother: 'I do forgive thee, unnatural though thou art.' Shakespeare's Prospero is to a large degree an agent through whom Shakespeare revenged all the humiliations he had endured as actor and playwright from kings and courtiers, and one can understand Auden being moved to adjust the balance in favour of Antonio. But the self-love which moulded Shakespeare's conception of Prospero is mild indeed compared with the self-love which has inflated Auden's Antonio. Shakespeare's Prospero returns to reality at the close of *The Tempest*:

Now I want  
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant,  
And my ending is despair  
Unless I be relieved by prayer. . .

Auden's Antonio dismisses Prospero as 'our melancholy mentor, the grown-up man, the adult in his pride' who, unlike Antonio, can 'never enter the green occluded pasture as a child', and then proceeds to distinguish between himself and the rest of the cast in a series of stanzas, one of which terminates each of the monologues spoken by the other characters. For example:

. . Dying Alonso does not know  
The diadem Antonio  
Wears in his world alone.  
  
. . Hot Ferdinand will never know  
The flame with which Antonio  
Burns in the dark alone.  
  
. . . Happy Miranda does not know  
The figure that Antonio,  
The Only One, Creation's O  
Dances for Death alone.

All this is the poet whistling, very melodiously, to keep up his spirits in the dark. In 'For the Time Being', his courage suddenly collapsing, the 'alone' with which each of the ten Antonio stanzas defiantly closes reappears to express the horror of isolation:

Alone, alone, about a dreadful wood  
Of conscious evil runs a lost mankind,  
Dreading to find its Father lest it find  
The goodness it has dreaded is not good.  
Alone, alone, about our dreadful wood.

This is moving, but there is little else in 'For the Time Being' which is not either factitious or trivial. Clearly Auden is well read in metaphysics and mysticism, but to write a religious poem it is not enough to look up the answers, one should also understand the questions. Auden has spared no expense on his Christmas Oratorio, as he calls 'For the Time Being'. The characters bear well-known names—Joseph and Mary, Herod and Simeon, the Wise Men and the Shepherds; and there are choruses of angels, fugal choruses, choiales, recitatives, and other garnishings, the total effect of which is most depressing. No amount of ingenuity can make good an absence of inspiration, as one example will be enough to show:

Our Father whose creative Will  
 Asked Being for us All,  
 Confirm it that Thy Primal Love  
 May weave in us the freedom of  
 The actually deficient on  
 The justly actual

To balance this complicated inanity we have such jets of silly-simple rapture as—

Let us run to learn  
 How to love and run,  
 Let us run to Love

and a great deal of colloquial prose and verse written in the vein of jaunty disillusion which used to charm Auden's less intelligent admirers, and perhaps charms them still.

The general impression left by this volume is that Auden is at present revolving in a circle, and the circle, in spite of Antonio, is a symbol of limitation and repetition, not of freedom and creation.

## II

### PENDRAGONSHIP

AS it is nearly thirty years since the publication of *Eminent Victorians*, it would be a relief if writers on Victorian themes ceased to proclaim themselves more highminded than Lytton Strachey. On the jacket of Mr. Ronald Chapman's *Life of G. F. Watts*<sup>1</sup> one reads: 'Mr. Chapman writes with entire freedom from bias such as distorts the portraits in Strachey's *Eminent Victorians*'; and in the penultimate paragraph of his last chapter Mr. Chapman says: 'Of course, for a Lytton Strachey, Watts is too vulnerable to be worth consideration. There is no fun in an Aunt Sally that falls at the first throw.' This repudiation of Strachey is the more superfluous because the fashion of being more highminded than Strachey was initiated by Strachey himself, his *Queen Victoria*, which appeared almost a quarter of a century ago, substituting tender regard and whimsical admiration for the disparaging irony of *Eminent Victorians*. Actually, Strachey came at the end of the revulsion against Victorianism, not at the beginning, standing in much the same relation to Ruskin and Morris, Samuel Butler and Bernard Shaw, as Thackeray to the real opponents of the eighteenth-century tradition, Blake and Wordsworth and Coleridge. In his heart Strachey, like Thackeray, preferred the past to the always menacing and muddled present. He could be caustic about the smugness of the Victorians, as Thackeray could be pained by the grossness of the Georgians; but the nostalgia in *Queen Victoria* and *Henry Esmond* reveals a permanent emotion, the criticism in *Eminent Victorians* and the *Lectures of the Four Georges* a passing mood.

Whether Mr. Chapman would have been as lively and acute as Lytton Strachey had he not determined to be more magnanimous, I cannot say. But his account of G. F. Watts is, at any rate, readable and full of matter for those who are interested in the peculiarities of the Victorian temperament. The father of G. F. Watts, having failed in his ambition to invent an instrument that would combine wind and string,

<sup>1</sup> *The Laurel and the Thorn: A Study of G. F. Watts*. By Ronald Chapman.

transferred his hopes of fame to his son, who from an early age was weighed down by the sense of an unfulfilled mission. As a measure of defence against his father he withdrew into himself, and thus the pattern of his life was formed—high aspirations neutralized by intense self-absorption. Charming, gifted, and helpless, he quickly attracted support and protection. His first patrons were Lord and Lady Holland, who introduced him into society and made him so much a member of the family that at last Lady Holland became apprehensive, writing: 'I have a strong and determined wish to break the spell, and make him feel that he is ever a welcome guest but not a constant and *necessary* inmate.' Through the Hollands he met many persons who were willing to sit to him, but to portray actual human beings seemed to him unworthy of an idealist. A school of English historical painters was being formed, under the patronage of the Prince Consort, and Watts hoped to find his life's work in painting large heroic figures from our past. The project falling through, he reconsidered his view of portrait painting, explaining his change of attitude as follows to a daughter of Lady Duff Gordon. He was, he said, beginning to look upon himself as a monster of selfishness. Objects of distress had recently come under his notice, and he had reflected that he had no right to throw away any means of being useful: 'To-day I saw a poor woman whose appearance evidenced better days applying for relief at the Workhouse (wh<sup>ch</sup> was refused). £20 would have gone far to set up the poor trembling broken-hearted creature, wh<sup>ch</sup> £20 I might easily have had in my power to give her, but beast that I am, I hadn't sixpence.' Genuine while it lasted, his impulse to relieve this woman did not last long. It was rather as a warning of what might befall himself that this image of indigent old had moved him. 'I see clearly,' he wrote in his next letter, 'that indifferent historical pictures are not likely to improve mankind or benefit individuals while hard cash honestly obtained may be decidedly useful, and so for the future I shall be willing to paint portraits.'

The Hollands wearying of Watts, their duty was taken over by the wife of an Indian Civil Servant, Mrs Prinsep, who built Watts up as a great genius, and after nursing and shepherding him for twenty years relinquished him to a Mrs. Barrington, herself in due course to be replaced by his second

wife. More than thirty years younger than Watts, Mary Tytler Fraser married him in his seventieth year. It was his second marriage, for Mrs. Prinsep, to cure him of the despondent broodings to which he was prone, had married him at forty-seven to Ellen Terry, aged sixteen, who proved unsuitable and after eighteen months was dismissed by Mrs. Prinsep. Watts consummated neither of his marriages; but while this omission did not answer satisfactorily with his first wife, it does not appear to have clouded the happiness of his second, unless modelling in clay, becoming a Tolstoian, and enlisting the local inhabitants in their Surrey retreat to build a Celto-Egyptian mortuary chapel may be held to signify an inner disquietude.

Watts, Mr. Chapman writes, found Tennyson ideally monumental both in thought and appearance, and would follow alongside him in unashamed hero-worship. There was a period, however, during which Watts got on Tennyson's nerves, and one can understand why. Watts was completely what Tennyson was only partially: a self-centred, self-indulgent recluse, frightened and fascinated by life. 'I wish,' he once wrote, 'I were strong enough to go where deeds of heroism and daring are done, and privations suffered. The aspiration, even with the violence, of an heroic age would have suited me better. As it is I am sick of life and desire to rest.' Comparing the portentous figures in Watts's heroic and allegorical canvases with Watts himself, Tennyson may well have had a twinge or two about his own Ballads of Heavy and Light Brigades, and his Sir Galahad, who speaks for Watts's 'Rider on the White Horse' as well as for himself in

My good blade carves the casques of men,  
My tough lance thrusteth sure,  
My strength is as the strength of ten,  
Because my heart is pure.

Pensioners of Mammon, Tennyson and Watts tried to forget the roaring factories which spun their comfort in dreams of an heroic past. An uneasy lassitude pervaded their dreams, the malaise of a disturbed mind sunk in a feather bed. It can be felt in all Watts's work, but reaches a richer and more lavish expression in Tennyson's 'Idylls of the King', the figures in which move apprehensively through a world of padded physical comfort:

. . . and every day  
Beheld at noon in some delicious dale  
The silk pavilions of King Arthur raised  
For brief repast or afternoon repose  
By couriers gone before, and on again,

Till yet once more ere set of sun they saw  
The Dragon of the great Pendragonship,  
That crown'd the state pavilion of the King,  
Blaze by the rushing brook or silent well.

Where are those couriers now? Where Tennyson's Pendragons  
and the paint brush dragons of Watts?

## TENNYSON AND W. H. AUDEN

REPRESENTATIVE writers, those who mirror the mood of an age, must necessarily be mediums for what is temporal, limited, and egotistic in human nature rather than for what aspires towards the universal life which underlies the discord of time. Writers are idolized not because they love their fellow men, which is never a recommendation and in extreme instances leads to crucifixion, but because their self-love is in tune with current fears and desires, and in giving it expression they are speaking for an inarticulate multitude. Hence the fact, curious only on the surface, that literary idols, as is shown in the four great English examples of the last century—Byron, Tennyson, Dickens, and Kipling—are self-absorbed much beyond the average, are prone to self-pity in their youth and to misanthropy in their later years, and die ringed round with glory but lonely and comfortless within.

In the introduction to his selection from Tennyson's poems W. H. Auden writes: 'There was little about melancholia that he didn't know; there was little else that he did.' This is carelessly put, for if Tennyson was as thoroughly versed in melancholia as Auden affirms he must have experienced it, and life through it, in many forms. What these forms were Auden would no doubt have learnt from a more careful examination of Tennyson's work than he seems to have made. Tennyson's melancholia had its roots in his sense of isolation in an alien universe. His sensibility was out of all proportion greater than his love; his awareness of life unwarmed by any feeling that he belonged to it or it to him. A phenomenon outside himself, it appalled him under three aspects: first, as an immense void in which millions of stars circled indifferently for ever, 'innumerable, pitiless, passionless eyes', while he, a speck of dust on a minute planet, moved wretchedly through

A life of nothings, nothing-worth,  
From that first nothing ere his birth  
To that last nothing under earth!

In its second aspect, when he looked around instead of up,

he saw Nature 'red in tooth and claw', careless not only of the single life but of its types:

She cries, 'A thousand types are gone  
I care for nothing, all shall go'

And when he turned from Nature to Man, men seemed to him

The flies of latter spring,  
That lay their eggs, and sting and sing  
And weave their petty cells and die

To distract himself from this threefold oppression he wove, like the Lady of Shalott, a magic web out of the pictures reflected in his mirror from the world passing by outside; but like her he soon began to sicken of shadows:

Out flew the web and floated wide,  
The mirror cracked from side to side,  
'The curse is come upon me,' cried  
The Lady of Shalott

Beneath the exquisite slow music of his dreams drummed the horror of his isolation, which he both hated and clung to, a division of feeling apparent in all his work, but most fully expressed in an early poem, *The Palace of Art*. It opens with a picture of the lordly pleasure-house he had built for his soul, full of long-sounding corridors and great rooms hung with tapestries and the silver music of bells swinging in the towers. His soul prospers there for three years, and then

Deep dead and loathing of her solitude  
Fell on her. . .  
And death and life she hated equally,  
And nothing saw, for her despair,  
But dreadful time, dreadful eternity,  
No comfort anywhere.

In the last stanza but one his soul prays to God to make her a cottage in the vale, where she may mourn and pray. In the last stanza she qualifies this petition:

Yet pull not down my palace towers, that are  
So lightly, beautifully built,  
Perchance I may return with others there  
When I have purged my guilt.

Desiring to keep his palace as well as to save his soul, Tennyson damaged the one without affecting the salvation of



the other, for the compromise which in due course he adopted was to add to his palace a new and unsightly wing reserved for the celebration of private and public virtue, and terminating in a chapel where doubtful honesty knelt in the garb of honest doubt. Yet the old music still sounded from the main building. In the epilogue to the *Idylls of the King* Tennyson might assure Queen Victoria that King Arthur was really the Prince Consort, and that our 'crown'd Republic's crowning common-sense' would save her from fierce or careless looseners of the faith, from softness breeding scorn of simple life, and cowardice, the child of lust for gold, and Labour with a groan and not a voice, and Art with poisonous honey stolen from France. But in the poem itself King Arthur is his ideal self whom he had loved and lost in Arthur Hallam:

He is not here, but far away  
The noise of life begins again,

the vanished saviour whom he would rejoin in the island-valley of Avilion, the king deserted and defeated in this life, erect and triumphant in another:

Then from the dawn it seem'd there came, but faint  
As from beyond the limit of the world,  
Like the last echo born of a great cry,  
Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice  
Around a king returning from his wars.

War, imaginatively considered, had a spasmodic fascination for Tennyson as providing through collective violence an antidote to solitary languor. In *Maud*, for example, the woeful hero ('nameless and poor' he calls himself, and confesses that he keeps only two domestics, a man and a maid) hails the solution to his private troubles provided by the Crimean War in terms familiar enough to modern ears:

And myself have awaked, as it seems, to the better mind,  
. . . I have felt with my native land, I am one with my kind,  
I embrace the purpose of God, and the doom assigned.

But this was only a passing mood. The blessings of war, the blessings of peace—in the end they were all equally meaningless to Tennyson, for whom the reality underlying both the dreams of his haunted solitude and the factitious enthusiasms of his incursions into ordinary existence was fear, and the anger bred by fear. Fear sees clearly what is within its range,

and *Locksley Hall: Sixty Years After*, spiritually as immature as the poetry of his youth, is more detailed and concrete in its trembling perception of the menace and horror ranging the external world:

Envy wears the mask of Love, and, laughing sober fact to scorn,  
Cries to Weakest as to Strongest, 'Ye are equals, equal-born.'

Equal-born? O yes, if yonder hill be level with the flat.  
Charm us, Oiator, till the Lion look no larger than the Cat,

Till the Cat thro' that mirage of overheated language loom  
Larger than the Lion,—Demos end in working its own doom.

That was how the dawning Century of the Common Man looked to Tennyson in his old age, and it must be admitted that he saw it clearly from his own standpoint, however paltry and limited that standpoint may seem in one to whom the world had given all that the world can give.

Neither Auden's selection, though it contains some of Tennyson's most beautiful verses and some of his most characteristic, nor his rather perfunctory and offhand introduction, suggests that he has formed a comprehensive view of the poet. It may raise Tennyson in his esteem, unless it lowers him in his own, if I summarize how much he and Tennyson have in common. Each began as the central figure of a coterie, and was early recognized as a poet representative of current thought and feeling. Each absorbed and was profoundly affected by the scientific and philosophical ideas of his time. Each sympathized with a Spanish revolution, though only Tennyson got as far as Spain ('In the summer of 1830', Auden writes, 'he made a curious journey with Hallam to the Pyrenees to take money from English sympathizers to a Spanish revolutionary general, his first and last excursion into practical politics'). Each preferred violence to remain on the far side of the Pyrenees, as is evident in Tennyson's references to revolutions nearer home and in Auden's

The evil and armed draw near,  
The weather smells of their hate  
And the houses smell of our fear.

Each treated art as a means of evading experience, not of realizing it; the Lady of Shalott's mirror reappearing in Auden as Prospero's, and Prospero, when he parts from Ariel, constraining himself for the first time to confront reality:

And now, in my old age, I wake, and this journey really exists,  
And I have actually to take it, inch by inch,  
Alone and on foot, without a cent in my pocket.

But Tennyson's dissatisfaction embraced himself. He chafed against his eternal adolescence instead of resting complacently in it, and in spite of everything a shadowy majesty invests his great and desolate figure.

## ALDOUS HUXLEY'S MYSTIC

THERE have been three fairly distinct periods in Aldous Huxley's work. In his early novels and short stories he reflected the spiritual collapse after the first world war. The idols of the nineteenth century—property and order—had been badly knocked about, and in a shattered world the pleasures of the senses, however transient and disappointing, seemed the only thing worth cultivating. Towards the close of the nineteen-twenties the Western world, especially in Germany, turned to making a faith of its despair. Materialism was refurbished for worship, but no longer in its reassuring nineteenth-century shape. Instead of security and comfort, and a self-interested respect for the laws and conventions which safeguard the well-being of the individual, hardness, self-assertion and power in its most primitive form began to be preached. In England, for various reasons, this faith was comparatively tepid, but it had its teacher in D. H. Lawrence, whose cure for civilization, so far as any coherent creed could be discovered in his writings, was to abandon the search for spiritual truth and lapse back into the darkness of primeval man.

Huxley's second period mirrored the fascination exercised over him by Lawrence. What the world needed, he said, was not less materialism but more materialism. Life must be lived for its own sake, without reference to hypothetical higher worlds. Saints, among whom he singled out St. Francis of Assisi for special reprobation, were men of diseased vanity and perverted instincts. The man of sound nature obeyed every instinct and indulged every desire, was passionately chaste or passionately the reverse according to his mood, and being in harmony with himself, lived and died without regret.

After Lawrence's death, Huxley suffered a revulsion from this factitious enthusiasm for an attitude which was even less natural to him than it had been to Lawrence. In *Brave New World*, with which his third period opened, he pictured the repulsive future which awaited a world that worshipped science and denied the spirit, made sexual pleasure

an end, and treated love as a passing illusion. In the years since this book appeared, the increasing violence of the age has intensified his innate disgust with life; he has turned to mysticism for a solution of the problem of existence, and has now produced, in the form of a biography,<sup>1</sup> a study of the conflict between self-assertion and self-transformation, between the love of power and the search for spiritual perfection.

His subject is François Leclerc du Tremblay, known in history as Father Joseph, and nicknamed l'Eminence Grise to distinguish him from the Red Cardinal, Richelieu. From his childhood François was haunted by the sufferings of Christ on the Cross. The thought of it was strong enough to quench his first and last love, felt for a girl when he was in his early teens; and inspired by it he founded an Order of Calvarian nuns. As a member of the Capuchin Order he lived a severely ascetic life, mortifying his body with fasts and flagellations; but he had a natural gift for diplomacy, perfected by some years in the world, and gradually he was drawn into politics. Having persuaded himself that France was the chief instrument of God's will, he laboured, in collaboration with Richelieu, to make her the dominant power in Europe. In pursuit of this aim he used every available means, however corrupt, and brought such suffering upon his own country by his prolongation of the Thirty Years' War that at his death he was detested by the whole of France.

In Huxley's view Father Joseph was a man passionately concerned to know God, and with experience of at least the preliminary states of mystical union. How then, he asks, solve the riddle that such a man should have worked wholeheartedly for a policy whose results in death, in misery, and in moral degradation were plainly to be seen in every part of seventeenth-century Europe?

Like everything else, mysticism has its pedantic exponents, and pedantry, which is an attempt to substitute erudition for insight and a lifeless terminology for living words, is still Huxley's greatest weakness. He gives us a sketch of mysticism from the Upanishads onwards, he makes a good deal of play with such terms as theocentricity and one-pointedness, and he brackets Wordsworth with Whitman and Kipling as

<sup>1</sup> *Grey Eminence*. Aldous Huxley.

a preacher of the 'false, ersatz mysticism' of the nineteenth century. But behind his magisterial manner, which was equally assured when he was advocating materialism ten years ago, there is not, so far as can be judged from this book, any personal experience to illumine his new view of life.

Mysticism is the intuition of a harmony which envelops but does not penetrate this life, and which can be apprehended here but not completely possessed. To grow to any height in a human being, it needs an open outward-turning nature, which seeks instinctively for union with other life. In natures which, like Father Joseph's, turn inwards, the soul feeds on its own isolation; and since to be isolated is to be unhappy, suffering is the permanent state of such a soul and the only element in which it is conscious of itself. To Father Joseph the agony on the Cross was both an image and, since he regarded it as the ultimate reality, a justification of his own pain. But the symbol of ultimate reality in the Christian religion is the reunion with God in the Resurrection, not the loneliness of Calvary. Father Joseph was not, as Huxley believes, a saint inexplicably entangled with a demon; but throughout his life a warped, tormented soul with less experience of the divine than any ordinary person who has felt happy in the spring. The child who at the age of four narrated the story of the Passion to his father's guests, and the boy who repelled his first stirring of love with the image of Christ's feet nailed to the Cross, developed naturally into the man who had nothing but suffering to communicate to his fellow-creatures. Father Joseph, Huxley writes, had known heaven, and so could find some slight consolation for his public life in the hope that he might one day learn, with God's grace, to 'annihilate' it. If, instead of pondering the impossible task of annihilating his past, he had been able to realize it, as the first step to transforming it, he could have extricated himself from the civil war of the will in which he was seeking, by fasts and flagellations, to appease his sense of guilt. But there was no road to Damascus in Father Joseph's life.

The large public which accepts Aldous Huxley as a guide in intellectual and spiritual matters will not be enlightened by this book, and may blame the theme instead of its treatment. Having reached the threshold of a true view of life, Aldous

Huxley could do more valuable work for the time being in narrating the stages of his journey than in dogmatizing about the unknown territory before him. Both for his own sake and for the sake of his readers he should withdraw to a shorter line and consolidate his position there.

## THE 'WHO' AND THE 'WHAT'

WHEN I was a master at Marlborough early in the war, a boy called J. S. Lloyd wrote an essay which contained this sentence: 'It is only when a man forgets who he is that he puts down what he is.' The subject of the essay was *King Lear*, and Lloyd's aphorism condensed into a few words a distinction I had made between *King Lear* and *Hamlet*—Hamlet, I had said, being a dramatization of Shakespeare's self-pity and self-love, created when he was too close to his own troubles and mortifications to see them or himself in proportion; and Lear being an expression of the conflict in Shakespeare between the claims and desires of this life and a deepening divination of a freer state of being:

'Thou art a soul in bliss, but I am bound  
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears  
Do scald like molten lead.'

As men very seldom forget who they are, and are therefore attracted towards works of art which are rooted in egotism and aim at rearranging the refractory world to the artist's satisfaction, *Hamlet* is the most popular of Shakespeare's plays. It is clearly pleasanter to identify oneself with Hamlet, the charming, gifted young prince who transfixes all his enemies with his tongue before transfixing them with his rapier, and for whose sake a beautiful girl drowns herself, than with the old irascible king who misjudges everything and everyone and dies beside the corpse of the daughter who had been murdered through his folly. But Lear is Everyman, and Hamlet is only Every Adolescent; for between the two plays Shakespeare had outgrown his view of life as a stage on which it was only fair that the others should group themselves round him, and had become conscious of the interdependence of human beings and of a unity which, however blindly and intermittently, they were struggling to attain.

This unity, according to the great mystics of all religions, includes variety, as a poem includes the separate lines of which



it is composed. In heaven, or whatever one calls this state of unity, individuality, the mystics say, will survive, but not egotism; the 'what' in Lloyd's aphorism, but not the 'who'. In the meantime, in the mixed conditions of this life, it is very difficult for us to imagine variety in unity, the many harmonized in the one. There is in everyone an incessant conflict between the 'who' and the 'what', between the egotism which desires to be unique and the individuality which aspires to its place in the universal pattern.

The other day I was lent a book which made some stir a few months ago, and which is, I believe, to be reissued shortly. It is the work of a man of great intelligence and sensibility, and in using it to illustrate the cramping effects of self-pre-occupation I hope I shall not add to the gloom of the author who, if he can break the cocoon which at present encloses him, should be able to achieve his deepest desire, the production of a masterpiece.

The book is *The Unquiet Grave: A Word Cycle* by Palinurus, and its jacket announces that the manuscript was submitted anonymously to *Horizon* and seemed unusual enough to warrant separate publication. Reading this, one visualizes the editor of *Horizon* listlessly picking up a manuscript and glancing at the first page. A phrase strikes him, he sits up. Sheet after sheet flutters to the floor—'But this is stupendous!' . . . 'But this is genius!' . . . 'Pascal couldn't better that!' and so on, till the last sheet falls from the editor's hand, and he sinks back, spent.

Later, perhaps, one learns that Palinurus and the editor of *Horizon* are the same person, whereupon the mystery dwindles into a piece of ingenious legerdemain designed to put the reader on the alert for something quite out of the common, even perhaps for a masterpiece. It was probably with the same end in view that the author borrowed his poignantly beautiful title from an old ballad which has nothing else in common with his experiment in self-analysis. And why Palinurus, the pilot in the *Æneid*? According to the jacket, the mind of the writer is 'haunted by the turbulent Mediterranean figure of Palinurus, the doomed pilot whose uneasy ghost seeks to be placated'; and the book has an epilogue in which Palinurus is investigated, historically and psychologically. All the same, I do not doubt that Patroclus or Pluto, Pyramus or Prester John, would have answered no less satisfactorily than Palinurus the

author's purpose of seasoning his dish with mythical and symbolical flavours.

Divested of these trimmings, the book is seen to be a miscellany of reflections, self-questionings, remembered sensations, and apposite sentences from congenial authors. The key to the author's conception of himself is supplied by what he calls a 'Home Truth from La Bruyère: "L'expérience confirme que la mollesse ou l'indulgence pour soi et la dureté pour les autres n'est qu'un seul et même vice."' It is in variations on this theme that the author is most convincing and least self-conscious, as in this vivid and moving passage: 'Sometimes at night I get a feeling of claustrophobia; of being smothered by my own personality, of choking through being in the world. During these moments the universe seems a prison wherein I lie fettered by the chains of my own senses and blinded through being myself.

'It is like being pinned underneath the hull of a capsized boat, yet being afraid to dive deeper and get clear. In those moments it seems that there must be a way out, and that through sloughing off the personality alone can it be taken.'

Less intense, and in varying degrees more mannered, but subtle and penetrating, are the passages in which the author writes of anxiety, or, as he prefers to call it, *Angst*. In a paragraph entitled 'Angoisses des Gares' he brilliantly summarizes his anxieties on approaching a London railway terminus: 'Sensations worse at arriving in the evening than the morning and much worse at Victoria and Waterloo than at Paddington.' Possible death of parents, entry of bailiffs, flight of loved one, a feeling of guilt about not being at work, fear of having been outdistanced by successful stay-at-home friends, are among his worries, which are deepened by 'the horror of London itself; of its hideous entrails as seen from the southern approaches . . .' But there is no suggestion that his spirits are lightened when he finds his parents still extant, his loved one at home, the bailiffs quiescent, and none of his friends best-sellers. Most people are amused by anxieties which have proved groundless, but the spiritual hypochondria of *Palinurus* is never lightened by a smile. To relieve his oppression he takes vitamin B, metatone, and other tonics; and these, he says, make him calm, coarse, and sensual; his voice becomes deeper, his manner more robust. 'But I also know that this is not my real personality, but a toned-up version of it, an escape from

the serious ego, and I soon return to my true diffident and dyspeptic self. Confidence does not become me.'

This is good self-criticism, as is clear when he deals in a brisk downright way with Jesus (a high-spirited and serious young man, with a warm dislike of his parents, a neurotic hatred of Pharisees, the family, his home-town, and adultery, a macabre sense of humour, and an overwhelming feeling of gratitude to Peter for believing in him), or becomes devil-may-care in July: 'Once more the bold dragon-fly of pleasure has brushed me with its wing. . . . Late June, July, and early August, fruit-eating months when the English become callous, pleasure-ridden, amorous, and Elizabethan.'

There is a good deal about pleasure in the book, but the catalogues of pleasurable sensations experienced by the author in the Alps, by the Mediterranean, and in the English countryside, do not really lighten the prevailing oppression, for pleasure is pleasurable when a man is happy, but otherwise is only a distraction from pain. There is much also about love, but here, even more than in his presentation of himself as a hedonist, the author seems concerned rather with the effect he hopes to produce than with the experience he is supposed to be evoking. For example: 'Sacred names: Rue de Chanaleilles, summer night, limes in flower; old houses, with large gardens enclosed by high walls, silent in the leafy heart of the Faubourg, sensation of what is lost; lost love, lost youth, lost Paris—remorse and folly. Aie!'

Does anyone reading Donne's

'All day the same our postures were,  
And we said nothing, all the day'

think of the writer?

Would anyone, reading the passage I have just quoted, think of love?

## MEETINGS WITH W. B. YEATS

A FEW months before the war, walking through Cork one morning, I saw a poster with these words on it: 'Hitler mentions Eire twice.' I had just been thinking of the effect England must have had on the Irish consciousness from Henry II down to Lloyd George, a brutal, powerful land just beyond the horizon always about to disgorge ships and troops upon its weak, poor neighbour. The poster showed me the other side of the Irish situation, how galling it was to Ireland to be ignored when it was not being laid waste, and what pleasure the nearest modern equivalent to Cromwell could give by casting a casual glance in the direction of Drogheda.

This Cork poster came back to me a few days ago when I was reading the letters exchanged between Yeats and Lady Gerald Wellesley. Anglo-Irish writers have always drawn even more attention to themselves than to their books. With Swift one thinks first not of *Gulliver's Travels* but of the tortured soul no longer lacerated by savage indignation, and so with the others, Goldsmith the wise zany, Sheridan witty even in the gutter, Wilde witty even in the dock, Shaw on a tub in Hyde Park, George Moore and shaded lamps, Yeats and Celtic Twilight. With Yeats, however, this urge towards self-dramatization was more embarrassed than with the others, both because he was more of a poet and because he had a less clear idea of the self he wished to dramatize. His effect on those who met him began by being mysterious but ended by being only mystifying.

The first time I met him was in the autumn of 1912, when I was supposed to be helping Frank Harris to edit a ladies' paper called *Hearth and Home*. As Harris took no interest in anything but the salary he drew and the expenses he managed to extract from his unfortunate fellow-directors, I was free to write what I liked, and hearing that Yeats was living behind St. Pancras Church, hardly a hundred yards from where I was, it seemed to me that I could fill a page of *Hearth and Home* with very little trouble if Yeats would give me an interview. At this time he was in his later forties, and apart from

his convenient situation I was anxious to see one of the most famous writers of the day. Getting no reply to my letter, I went round one morning after breakfast, rang the bell and waited in some nervousness for the door to open. The house was one of a row in a thoroughfare for pedestrians but not for traffic, an isthmus connecting two streets, a faded unpushful backwater with two or three small shops, and perhaps a shoemaker who subsisted on resoling shoes and a tailor who did not aspire beyond turning old suits. Presently the door opened, and there unmistakably was Yeats, in a dressing-gown, a narrow dark passage behind him. Some moments having passed during which I had a feeling as if his body were being slowly reanimated by its soul, returned for that purpose from some far region, Tibet perhaps, I explained who I was. Yeats, pushing his straggling hair back from his forehead, murmured, 'Yes, yes, I remember. . . . Will you come upstairs?'

Seating himself in an upright arm-chair between the fire and a table on which a large volume rested, he said, in answer to a question put by me from the far side of the table, 'I do not read my contemporaries. I cannot see their faults: for I share them, and so I read only in men who have been dead two or three hundred years. In them I am able to distinguish what is of permanent value from what is trivial, what is temporal.' He opened the volume on the table. 'This morning I have been reading in Donne, though indeed Donne has no faults.' He smiled in a wan, abstracted way, as though the faultlessness of Donne were a mystery he had lost all hope of communicating to others. A little later, having mentioned Baudelaire, he paused to spell the name. I told him I knew it, and he explained that a journalist in New York had made him speak of 'Bandolier'. Taking advantage of a slight relaxation in his attitude, I asked if he thought Oscar Wilde a snob, a crudely framed question, but I had just been reading Harris's *Life of Wilde*, a work devoid of nuances. 'Wilde was not a snob,' Yeats answered. 'He was an Irishman; and England to an Irishman is a far, strange land. To Wilde the aristocrats of England were as the nobles of Baghdad.' Frank Harris, I said, held that it was a nervous collapse not courage which prevented Wilde from fleeing the country before his trial. Did he agree with that view? 'Wilde,' Yeats replied, 'was an Irish gentleman. It was with him a point of honour to face the trial. It could not have occurred to him to act otherwise.'

My next meeting with Yeats was in the summer of 1924, at Maloja, in the Engadine. He was sitting outside the Palace Hotel with Lennox Robinson whose lively friendliness was in strong contrast with Yeats's gloom. Introducing myself, I mentioned the interview of twelve years earlier, and he said he remembered it, and that it was the best interview he had had, his sombre expression leaving me to infer what the other interviews were like.

He was spending two or three days at Maloja as the guest of my father, the head of a tourist firm, and Yeats's part in the arrangement was to deliver a lecture to the visitors at the Palace Hotel. Shortly before his lecture the headmistress of a fashionable girls' school came up to me and said: 'I saw you this morning sitting on a sofa with Mr. Lennox Robinson. You were talking with him for half an hour. Didn't you feel proud?' This amiable lady was not below the general level of Yeats's audience, which, when Yeats recited 'Innisfree' with an air of suppressed loathing, beamed ardently at him, as though ready at a word to fall in behind him and surge towards the bee-loud glade.

Yeats had changed a good deal since 1912. He was stouter, and carefully as well as picturesquely dressed. An aristocrat had been superimposed on the poet, and his small black eyes, hard as marbles, looked out upon the world with a mixture of contempt and mistrust. One evening when I was sitting with him and Lennox Robinson we were joined by H. A. L. Fisher, whose very proper eagerness to hear what Yeats thought of various famous writers brought out no responsive geniality in Yeats, his tired disdainful air quickening only at the name of Balzac, whose romanticization of any and every form of power seemed to move him deeply. 'All Nietzsche is in Balzac,' he intoned, and on my expressing some surprise at this opinion, in view of Nietzsche's contempt for Balzac as a vulgarian obsessed with money, Yeats gave me an angry look and withdrew into himself for a minute or two. Mr. Fisher, who was my tutor at Oxford, where I failed in my Finals, clearly being no more anxious than Yeats to hear further from me, I did not intervene again.

On another occasion a story I told brought out a certain humour which I had not suspected Yeats of possessing. 'That is bizarre,' he said. 'I like what is bizarre in life. A short while ago I was asked by John Harris to give a lecture in

Cambridge. The father of John Harris is a surgeon in Harley Street, and when I went into a barber's shop the barber was speaking of the father of John Harris, who, he said, was in reality the only surgeon in London, the others being merely his agents. A patient, the barber said, would call upon one of these men, who would be reputed to be skilful in some branch of surgery, and an operation would be arranged. But when the patient was under chloroform, the father of John Harris would come up through a trap door, perform the operation, and vanish before the patient was again conscious.' Yeats laughed, there was a cunning gleam in his eye, and he looked very Irish.

Lady Gerald Wellesley compares Yeats with Coleridge. Each was a teacher as well as a poet, and neither achieved anything approaching what was expected of him. But whereas the genius of Coleridge is like a sunken treasure ship, and Coleridge a diver too timid and lazy to bring its riches to the surface, the genius of Yeats is like a rare plant, and Yeats a skilful, pertinacious gardener wrestling vainly with the weeds and sterile soil of Protestant Ireland.

## THE LETTERS OF RAINER MARIA RILKE

THERE is a story of an enthusiastic woman who during a performance of Hamlet by Henry Irving turned to her companion and asked her what she thought of it. 'Quite striking, but I don't like his weak knees,' was the reply. 'Weak knees!' cried the enthusiast. 'It's not weak knees! It's his sympathy, his beautiful sympathy!' Why the tone of Miss E. M. Butler's introduction to Mr. Hull's admirable translation of Rilke's letters should have recalled this story to me may appear as this article proceeds.

When the first world war broke out Rilke was swept along in the general excitement, pouring out patriotic verse, and writing to congratulate a friend on 'the splendid chance you have of taking part in the action of this momentous year as a standard-bearer'. His fever soon abated, and his later reflections on the war expressed his own individual attitude, with its alternations of deep and subtle insight when he looked out on the world, and nerveless despondency, sometimes quickening into terror, when his gaze turned in on himself again. In the first mood he wrote: 'Distress and disaster are perhaps no more prevalent than before, only more tangible, more active, more visible. For the misery in which mankind has lived daily since the beginning of time cannot really be increased by any contingency. . . . Wonderful, of course, is the evidence of such vast misery suffered, accepted, and achieved on all sides, by everybody. . . . but how much in such conduct is stubbornness, desperation, and (already!) habit.' In the second mood he wrote: 'Munich is getting empty . . . Outwardly I enjoy the most regular days imaginable, but inwardly there is an abyss, one lives on the edge of it, and below down there lie, smashed perhaps, who knows?—the things of one's former life. Was it this, I ask myself a hundred times, was it this that lay on top of us all these years like an immense weight, this frightful future which now constitutes our hideous present?'

A comparison of these two passages shows that as soon as war, previously seen as one only of the forms through which



human suffering is expressed, came too near Rilke he mistook it for suffering itself, and thought that if he could escape from it he could escape from his own fate. Under the stress of this feeling he wrote to the Princess Marie vom Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe: 'It is, I know, a question of winning an *inner* resting-place . . . the right conditions outside will help the inner ones.' This hint was not sufficient to save him from a few weeks on the barrack square: 'I have been and am reft away from everything mine, smothered under the landslide of the universal cataclysm.' But a speedy term was put to this ordeal, the Princess causing him to be conveyed to the War Office in Vienna, to a department which was, it seems, reserved for poets in need of an inner resting-place.

To weave these sparse, uninspiring details into a romantic pattern has not proved beyond the competence of Miss Butler. 'The grim shadow of the war', she writes, 'overtook Rilke on one of his infrequent visits to Germany, enveloped him completely—even hiding him from sight at one moment in the ranks of the infantry—loomed darkly over him in the Ministry of War in Vienna, and all but succeeded in extinguishing his radiance for good.'

At the time of the German collapse in November 1918, Rilke was in Munich, where in the Utopian fever induced by general chaos he indulged for a few days or hours a hope of a new world, to be instituted by 'fellows who had been four years at the front—all of them so simple and frank and "of the people"'. In the following summer, writing to the Countess Aline Dietrichstein from Switzerland, he said she would realize how necessary it was for him to get away from Munich, 'for behind so much upheaval, bombination, and malicious muddle there was in the end absolutely no will for real change and regeneration, in which one would have been only too ready to co-operate and take one's part'. His first days in Switzerland were spent at Nyon on the Lake of Geneva, in a villa belonging to the Countess Mary Dobrzensky (*née* Wenckheim). He had not, Miss Butler says, been 'really beaten personally' by the war; but he found Switzerland too full of mountains—'there are so terribly many of them'—and seems to have been in a highly nervous state until a fortunate visit to Berne steadied him. 'Old houses, old things exercise the most compelling power over me,' he wrote to the Countess M., from a mountain eyrie in the Bergell valley. The ancient houses of

Beine, 'preening themselves above their porches with an aloof air where they face the street, but towards the river Aar, with a more communicative and open mien where the lovely gardens lie outspread', soothed him, and further consolation was provided by his stay in the Bergell valley, in a palazzo with a French garden-terrace. In this ancestral mansion of the Salis family his taste for the antique was fully satisfied—old wardrobes, old chests of drawers, an old garden 'within whose border of trimmed box hedges the wild flower-summer teems and throbs', and 'the crowning seduction of all—an old library, otherwise inaccessible to the guests: the ancient Salis library preserved intact!'

He had only seven more years to live. 'Good fortune', as he anonymously puts it, enabled him to revisit Paris, where before the war he had as Rodin's secretary passed his happiest days, and he enjoyed a few weeks in Venice in rooms furnished with especial care and feeling by the Princess Marie Taxis, who from her childhood, he says, had remained a part of Venice. But most of this period was spent in Switzerland, in the deep trough of the Rhone valley, in a little old castle rented for him by a friend to serve as a shelter from outer ills. There, towards the close of 1926, he fell sick of a rare and incurable disease. 'For two years,' he said shortly before his death, 'I have had the feeling and the absolute certainty that something was piling itself up and up in me, and now the collapse has come.' He broke out in abscesses which caused him appalling agony almost till the end, but his physician, Dr Hammerli, has recorded that in their long conversations about his illness Rilke would never utter the word 'death'. He still clung to life, and whenever he seemed to be approaching the dreaded word he would curiously relapse into silence.

In theory, as appears in a remarkably interesting letter to the Polish translator of his *Duino Elegies*, Rilke held that 'there is neither a this-side nor a that-side, but a single great unity in which the beings who transcend us, the angels, have their habitation'. But emotionally he was conscious of a vast gulf between the this-side and the that-side. The angel of the *Elegies*, he writes in this letter, is "terrible" for us, because we . . . still cling to the Visible'. Though irradiated by gleams of beauty and flashes of insight, the *Duino Elegies* lack the power and harmony which sound in the poetry of those who have accepted the nature of things as experience in this life,

and thus have apprehended a unity beyond its pains and delights. Rilke, through some paralysis of the will, would accept only the delights of life, and so in the end had most agonizingly to taste its pain.

'It is a curious anomaly', Miss Butler writes, 'that he, who feared personal relationships and shrank from them so much because of the inroads they made on his time and his peace of mind, should nevertheless always have been entangled in them.' Masterfully feline women had an irresistible attraction for Rilke—Lou Salomé, by whom Nietzsche, another paralysed will, had also been magnetized; Clara Westhoff, a sculptress who became his wife; the Princess Marie Taxis; and many others. But it appears from Miss Butler's account of his marriage that, even with his wife, he preferred correspondence to any closer form of intimacy. She was, Miss Butler says, his principal correspondent and the object of his greatest regard during his middle years, and the fundamental relationship between them remained unimpaired after his final refusal to live with her again; though 'later they gradually fell apart, it is true'.

After studying the portraits in this volume of the women whom Rilke felt to be his complements, the embodiments of the power he could not release in himself, I was confirmed in my feeling that he expressed his spiritual predicament more truly and more intensely in his magnificent early poem 'The Panther' than in any of his later work:

The padded walk whose strong and supple pace  
Turns in the smallest circle round and round  
Is like a dance of power about a place  
In which a mighty will stands stunned and bound.

*A WOMAN OF THE PHARISEES*

*La Pharissienne*, very sensitively translated by Gerard Hopkins, is the first volume in an English edition now being prepared of François Mauriac's work. Of its author I know only that he is a Catholic and has a high place among contemporary French writers; and, as I have read nothing of his except this book, anything I say about it must suffer from the fact that I cannot relate it to his other work.

The scene of the novel is in Bordeaux and the surrounding neighbourhood, the time is the early years of this century, and the story is told by 'young Pian'. When a novel is told in the first person, one expects the narrator to be the central character, the person whose experiences, narrated at first hand, make up the theme of the book, but young Pian is, so far as the action of the story is concerned, quite a subordinate character, whose Christian name, Louis, very few readers, I suspect, would be able to give offhand. How, then, is he able to reproduce the many conversations he could not have heard and report in detail all the episodes at which he was not present? He raises this point himself, and explains that he is the sort of man who keeps old papers, and that he has at his disposal the private diary of one person, notes made by another, and various relevant letters. This explanation does not seem to me a device to heighten the verisimilitude of an invented story. The impression I get from this book is that Louis Pian is Mauriac, and that its events and persons are, no doubt with a good deal of transposition and expansion, the events and persons that affected Mauriac most deeply in his early years. Hence the clumsy construction and other artistic flaws in a story which is in essence the spiritual drama of a character who stands on the edge of the narrative.

Apart from this central defect there is a good deal of untransmuted material in *A Woman of the Pharisees*, especially towards the close. The episode of Louis Pian's engagement, for instance, has hardly any connexion with the story; and in general one has in these concluding pages the feeling that the author is hurrying through a number of events which required

more time and reflection to be completely assimilated into the main theme. The process by which a writer's past is transformed from factual into imaginative truth is obscure and slow, for it does not come easily to anyone to see his own experiences merely as particular illustrations of general truths. There is a perpetual conflict in every writer between 'This happened to *me*' and 'This happened', and only what is written under the second sign is art. Cervantes, for example, was an artist when he reflected the two sides of his nature in Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, but ceased to be one in the account of his captivity in Algiers. As, however, *A Woman of the Pharisees* was written during the German occupation of France, and as its theme is nothing less fundamental than the relation of the individual soul to God, the high level of detachment reached and for the most part maintained by the author is evidence of a very fine talent and an exceptionally sincere nature.

The story opens in a Bordeaux school kept by a Monsieur Rausch, who is pictured very vividly, though without any effect of caricature, a pale man, with red crimped hair, and a hard dry hand, more to be feared than a slab of wood—his feet, even in the height of summer, stuffed into padded felt slippers. Louis Pian is attached to a boy called Jean de Mirbel, who despises him as rather spiritless and well behaved, but treats him with a rough friendliness. During the holidays Jean falls in love with Louis' sister Michèle, and the double jealousy felt by Louis, of his sister and his friend, is wonderfully portrayed—'I was never happy unless I was defending Michèle against Jean and his often ill-natured teasing. But almost always, just when I thought that they had quarrelled for good and all, they would quite suddenly make it up.' Louis fades into the background as the love between Jean and Michèle develops and becomes intensified by the attempts to extinguish it made by Brigitte Pian, Louis and Michèle's stepmother.

Up to a point Brigitte Pian is pictured with extraordinary skill as a self-righteous woman who mistakes a love of power for a love of her fellow-creatures, and a desire to destroy the happiness of others for a desire to promote it. She is the patroness of two school-teachers, Monsieur Puybaraud and Mademoiselle Octavia Tronche, humble colourless persons, who fall in love and hope to find in marriage the happiness

which has hitherto escaped them. Madame Pian's rage, disguised as disappointment that two persons who have been living in selfless celibacy should fall from grace, intimidates Puybaraud and Octavia, but they are meekly persistent and still further exasperate Madame Pian by giving a religious colour to their desires. Puybaraud convinces himself that he had been lacking in humility when he supposed that he had the strength to eschew the normal destiny of mankind, and Octavia pleads that the birth of a child is God's loveliest mystery, and that she and her beloved, though they may not, as Christ enjoined, become like little children, can at least bring them into the world, 'and that is no small thing'. After their marriage they are ostensibly helped but really persecuted by Madame Pian, they fall into extreme poverty, Octavia dies in giving birth to a still-born child, and Puybaraud joins an anti-clerical paper, in whose columns he lampoons Madame Pian. Meanwhile her campaign against Jean and Michèle has separated the adolescent lovers, and as a by-product has led to the suspension from his office of the lovable and well-meaning, though injudicious, priest to whose care Jean had been entrusted.

As a Pharisee Madame Pian is superbly drawn, but her repentance and her spiritual tranquillity at the close are not convincing. The attitude of the narrator, Louis Pian, to his stepmother is somewhat baffling, and after a time one feels that her problem is, in a large degree, also his, that when he exposes her egotism he is lacerating himself and that her salvation includes his. Quite early in the narrative he suddenly interpolates an apology for her, completely out of tune with the context, beginning: 'In every circumstance of her life Brigitte Pian was sincerely anxious to do good.' A little later he represents himself as conceiving, under the influence of Pascal, an admiration for Brigitte Pian and taking her side against Puybaraud at the worst stage of his suffering. 'I found it [the Brigitte Pian type] beautiful. It reminded me of Mother Agnes, of Mother Angélique, and of those other proud ladies of Port-Royal. I can see myself now, implacable in my youthful fervour, seated beside the log fire in front of a little table loaded with dictionaries and note-books, with, opposite me, that poor, worn-out figure stretching two small, grubby white hands to the blaze, his uncobbled shoes smoking in the heat.' The essential fact of egotism is the isolation in which it involves

the soul, and Louis is as lonely as Brigitte. 'On that day', he writes on another occasion, 'I looked for the first time on the face of loneliness. He is an old enemy now. . . . Loneliness has struck me every imaginable blow. There is no spot in me left to strike. It has set me many traps, and I have fallen into every one. But it torments me no longer. We sit, now, one on either side of the fire, on winter evenings, when the fall of a fir-cone and the sobbing of the night wind mean as much to me as the sound of a human voice.' This is written from a much deeper level than the concluding paragraph of the book: 'When I alluded to past events, she talked of them quite openly. But I could feel that she had become detached even from the consciousness of her faults, and that she had decided to lay everything at the throne of the Great Compassion. . . . She understood at last that it is not our deserts that matter but our love.' What are the deserts referred to, the reader may wonder, and how can there be any desert where there has been no love? Between the inferno of the self so poignantly described in these pages and the state which Mauriac symbolizes as the Great Compassion there is a gulf across which no one can be transported merely by an act of intellectual assent to no matter what belief.

## GEORGE SAINTSBURY

THE centenary of George Saintsbury's birth has been commemorated in a volume<sup>1</sup> edited by Dr. John Oliver and Mr. Augustus Muir, who were pupils of Saintsbury when he was Professor of English Literature at Edinburgh University. In addition to a number of essays and studies by Saintsbury, the volume contains some personal impressions by friends and a biographical memoir by Mr. Blyth Webster.

In a postscript to his memoir Mr. Webster says that Saintsbury, following his favourite Thackeray, did not wish a biography of himself to be written. Mr. Webster believes, however, that his own memoir would not have affronted Saintsbury. Such, at least, would appear to be the meaning of 'It has not seemed impossible, on principles which he would not have disallowed, to salute, and appease, his shade.' There is certainly little to upset even Saintsbury's shade in Mr. Webster's sketch, which contains only two really intimate disclosures, the first that Saintsbury had a mother, the second that he had a wife. Information about Saintsbury's appointments and writings takes up most of Mr. Webster's space; and when he occasionally essays a brief flight it is over seemly and reposeful territory, a cathedral close or an Oxford quadrangle, as in his linking of Saintsbury with Dr. Pusey, the well-known theologian—both of them 'great gentlemen, devout and heroic lovers, and impressive figures of the prime'. None the less, the art of so painting a portrait as to afford no clue at all to the sitter's appearance has yet to be perfected, and there are some suggestive and illuminating details in Mr. Webster's sketch.

Saintsbury described his father as of the 'middle and secretaryish class', and himself, when he went up to Oxford with a scholarship, as 'young, shy, rather poor, and only day-schooled'. Visiting Oxford once as a boy, at a time when he had little hope of going there, he had felt it to be the one place for him; his time as an undergraduate deepened this

<sup>1</sup> *George Saintsbury. The Memorial Volume. A New Collection of his Essays and Papers.*



feeling, and the first great disappointment of his life was his failure to win a fellowship. His second disappointment was when he realized that he would never be a poet or an original writer of any kind; and there was also, I think, a disappointment in love.

Temperamentally a romantic, to whom regret was the dearest of all emotions, Saintsbury derived a good deal of happiness from these vanished dreams, which formed a background to his reading and deepened his distaste for ordinary life. For some years he was a political journalist, his politics being those of a Tory don, but even more ferocious than those of the recluses still ensconced in the cloistered Eden he had been forced to leave. On India, on Ireland, on the poor, in short on any collection of human beings whose uneasy shiftings threatened his precarious peace of mind, he wrote with that insensibility to the reversible nature of his argument which panic disguised as righteous indignation usually produces. To give one example, he speaks somewhere of Labour's ideal being the progressive diminution of work, and the progressive increase of profit, by a single class at the expense of other classes, an accurate indictment, no doubt, but equally applicable to every other ascendant power in our history, from William the Conqueror's knights onwards.

To Saintsbury the past was not an illustration of the present, but a refuge from it, and the present tolerable only so far as it was a museum stocked with cultural, religious, and political relics from the nobler ages of mankind. Feeling like this about life, he valued literature not as a revelation but as a daydream in which he could forget the day. Nothing, not even the desire of the poor to become richer, exasperated him so much as any attempt to trace a man in his work, except when he himself made the attempt, and could therefore keep it within strict limits. He read to get away from himself; so the last thing he wanted to find in a book was another human being. Here are two cries from the heart: 'Let us also once more rejoice in, and thank God for, the fact that we know nothing about Homer, and practically nothing about Shakespeare,' and 'It is generally thought a crime to destroy evidence; but I almost think it would be pardonable to do so if anything really discreditable, or even anything importantly characteristic in a favourable way, turned up about "William".'

Whitman's 'the *accepted* hells beneath' is quoted by him more

treatment of Fielding shows. In an examination of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's remark that Fielding 'could feel rapture with his cook-maid', he saves Fielding from the imputation of unlegalized rapture by reminding the reader that Fielding married the maid, raises the maid's social status, to his own if to nobody else's satisfaction, by affirming that she was 'not a cook-maid at all', reduces the 'rapture' to 'warm affection and hearty respect', and assigns 'such "raptures" as we have of his' to his first marriage, with 'a very different woman, who was both a lady and a beautiful one'. From this good beginning he works away until Fielding emerges as 'a person orderly, correct, and even a little finikin'; and a final touch completes this debasement of a courageous, kindly eighteenth-century gentleman into a sort of late Victorian twin of Rudyard Kipling: 'It is a horrid joy to think how perfectly capable Fielding was of having joined in that practical joke of the young gentlemen at Cambridge, which made Gray change his college.'

Thackeray did not require any of this doctoring. His claret-and-Ecclesiastes melancholy and his nervous insistence on his gentlemanliness were naturally congenial to Saintsbury, as were also his finer qualities: his subtle perceptiveness, the informal elegance of his style, the gleams of humour and poetry irradiating his sad landscape. Above all, the tragedy of Henry and Beatrix, as he somewhere calls it, appealed to Saintsbury, for whom *Henry Esmond* was not only the greatest of Thackeray's novels, but I believe also, as a portrait of an unhappy yet always flawlessly correct lover, the book which had meant most to him as a human being. In one of his *Scrap Books* he quotes a poem he wrote in his youth. Here are two verses.

The sad spring sun looked wearily forth  
On the March winds fretting the sea;  
And the snowdrop shivered and turned from the north,  
When my last love dawned for me.

And the sun of July blazed laughter and scorn  
And a dead calm smothered the sea;—  
And the rose in her pride veiled canker and thorn,  
When my last love died for me.

This is how Henry Esmond, if he had come under Heine's influence, might have written of Beatrix. I am, however, content not to push conjecture about Saintsbury further than

he himself pushed conjecture about Hobbes. Penetrating to the man behind the moving passage in which Hobbes wrote of love that they have better fortune in it than care less than they that care more, Saintsbury says that little or nothing is known of Hobbes's youth, and that it might seem, not merely from his works generally, but from most of the anecdotes about him, that he never could have been young. Yet, Saintsbury continues, he must at some time or other have been in love, though 'most probably no "shepherd's hour" ever sounded for him at Malmesbury or at Magdalen Hall, at Chatsworth or at Paris'.

In the rhythm of this sentence there is something of the 'unboisterous hopelessness' which Saintsbury finds in Hobbes himself. Probably this was his prevalent mood when the light of whatever paradise had once been closed to him at last faded away, and he was, I imagine, thinking of himself when in one of his later books he italicized the second line in an exquisite quatrain which he had rescued from a forgotten poet of the eighteenth century:

Where longs to fall that rifted spire,  
*As weary of the insulting air,*  
The poet's thought, the warrior's fire,  
The lover's sighs are sleeping there.

## SIR WALTER SCOTT AND JOHN BUCHAN

HAVING spent a good deal of February reading Sir Walter Scott after an attack of influenza, I am sorry that no one has written on him of late, for duty and inclination would both have been complied with had I been able to connect the following reflections with some study of Scott just issuing from the press.

The most recent book I could find, in the public library of a seaside town, was John Buchan's *Sir Walter Scott*, which appeared in 1932, with a dedication 'To Two Friends, Lovers of Sir Walter, Stanley Baldwin and George Macaulay Trevelyan'. On a much smaller scale John Buchan suffered from the same internal division as Scott, and had therefore every reason to persuade his readers and himself that 'just as there was no strife or sedition in Scott's intellectual powers, so there were no fissures in his character'. In his dealings with the world Buchan, who began life in a Lowland manse and ended it as Lord Tweedsmuir, Governor-General of Canada, was dignified but not difficult, persistent but not pushing, and possessed in the highest degree the invaluable, though necessarily unspectacular, art of not treading on important corns. Off duty, Buchan was another person, with a longing for a life inspired by heroic passion, not ruled by calculation; but as his practical sense would allow him to indulge this side of his nature only in day-dreams, and as, moreover, these day-dreams, embodied in a series of brilliant romances, sold extremely well, the horizon beyond which he so often rode in fancy remained as distant as ever to his waking self. Scott's predicament, allowance made for the difference between very great genius and very considerable talent, was much the same as Buchan's; and Buchan's study of him is therefore in essence an apologia for the senior partner in the Lord Tweedsmuir-John Buchan combination, an attempt to demonstrate that a great position in the world lays on a poet who is also a man the duty to sacrifice his intellectual and imaginative integrity to its attainment.

Scott, says Buchan, never lost himself in the stuffy parlours

of self-conscious art; he was a minstrel in the ancient pattern, and it was his business to capture popular favour and give the world what it wanted. His true heroes belonged to the sphere of action, he never ceased to protest against the exaggerated repute of the spinner of words, and it puzzled him, when he met the Duke, that Wellington should show a friendly interest in the author of 'bits of novels'. 'He was' (Buchan sums up) 'more interested in life than in art, in character than in intellect.'

What was the life which interested Scott more than his art? What was the character to which he subordinated his intellect? His lameness, the result of an illness in infancy, was, as with Byron, the physical expression of a profound flaw in his nature. It has often been said (though not by Buchan, whose underlying sense of Scott's genius saved him from his ineptitude) that, but for his lameness, Scott would have been a man of action. The truth is that his lameness, by threatening to isolate him from the common pursuits of mankind, sport, affairs, and the struggle for social advancement, stimulated his desire to prove himself in these activities to an extent which was equally damaging to his achievement as a writer and to his happiness as a man. A vein of hysteria, strangely mingled with his common sense and careful eye to his own advantage, turned all his interests into obsessions—his passion for sport, his complex publishing transactions (which even Buchan allows might justify a moral criticism), and, above all, the romanticization of high social position which enticed him through the baronial splendours of Abbotsford to the precipice beyond. There was nothing in Scott's worldliness, says Buchan, of what we call snobbery. This is a certificate of Sir John Falstaff's solvency issued by Mr. Micawber. Whatever the internal insecurity or other reasons which transform a rational approval of a social hierarchy into a kind of mystical worship of its higher grades, no one not deeply interested in arguing the opposite view would deny that the laird of Abbotsford and the Master of Ceremonies during George IV's visit to Edinburgh had suffered such a transformation, with all its train of ill effects on his life and on his work.

His honour for Scott was based on his ability to maintain himself before the world as a gentleman of an antique and nobler pattern than modern times could show. When General

Gourgaud, incensed by Scott's *Life of Napoleon*, challenged him to a duel, Scott, writes Buchan, 'rose joyfully to the occasion—to the scandal of some of his more ladylike biographers; the scribe had had too long the upper hand, and here was something for the rough-rider'. The reader may be conscious of something like an anticlimax as Buchan continues: 'Scott sent to the press a careful statement of the case, Gourgaud made a furious rejoinder, and the matter dropped.' But Scott's courage, in a test of this kind, cannot be questioned. Yet courage of this sort, and even the dogged fortitude with which he encountered the severer test of financial ruin, do not cancel his failure in his main obligation, which was to do his own work as well as he could. Scott's sense of inferiority in the presence of Wellington was not because Wellington was a soldier and Scott a poet, but because Wellington fought to win and Scott wrote to make money. If Scott had taken literature as seriously as Wellington took war, they would, in the very unlikely event in such circumstances of a meeting taking place, have met on equal terms. Buchan, tries to confuse the issue with his 'stuffy parlours of self-conscious art' and 'essays in belittlement by adherents of some minor coterie'. However worthless the opinions of these unnamed critics, they do not invalidate the verdicts against Scott which were pronounced by Wordsworth, who said that he never addressed the immortal part of man; by Goethe, who expressed the same idea less precisely and at greater length; and by Beethoven, who would not go on with *Kentworth* because 'this man writes for money'.

Nevertheless, and in spite of any and every verdict that may justly be pronounced against him, Scott is, it seems to me, the most richly endowed dramatic writer in modern literature, Shakespeare and Cervantes alone excepted. He never, not even in *Old Mortality*, wrote a completely good book. The test of a masterpiece is its conclusion, which reveals the writer's understanding and acceptance of the nature of things; and neither Scott's own feelings nor his regard for his public would ever allow him any but a happy ending. But the evil spell, the curse of Abbotsford, which sowed his stories with false sentiment, pretentious romanticism, and unnatural melodrama, was often lifted, and then for a space his humour, less poetic but more comprehensive than Shakespeare's, and his observation of his fellow-creatures, searching as Tolstoi's

and genial as Chaucer's, had full play. Has any other dramatic writer drawn so convincing a politician as Louis XI, so lifelike a fanatic as Balfour of Burley, or an original at once so comic and so real as James I? Has anyone except Cervantes created two characters comparable with Cuddie Headrigg and his mother in *Old Mortality*? Don Quixote and Sancho Panza move against a larger background and touch a deeper reality, yet even they are not quite so authentic, so perfectly inter-related, as this unmatched pair.

Scott, says Buchan, had not the metaphysical turn of his countrymen. The nature of reality, to put it in a different way, was something he preferred not to think about; but reality does not cease to operate when it is ignored. The other day I was looking at the death-masks of a number of writers, painters, and musicians. All bore the marks of great suffering but in most of them there was an underlying confidence, a sense of a goal not unattainable, though far distant. Only Scott looked quite hopeless, inexpressibly forlorn and forsaken. I thought of the 'Envoy to the Lady of the Lake', written when he was still young but already, like a sleeper who is in increasing pain, more conscious of his suffering than of the dreams with which he sought to divert it:

Much have I owed thy strains on life's rough way,  
Through secret woes the world has never known,  
When on the weary night dawned wearier day  
And bitterer was the grief devoured alone.

## LOGAN PEARSALL SMITH

ALTHOUGH no one is quite free from money worries, and the financial apprehensions of the well-to-do, especially when groundless and formless as in a prosperous age like the Victorian, are perhaps more nerve-racking than the well-defined anxieties of the impecunious, there is a subtle influence in material security which stamps upon those in enjoyment of it a kind of family likeness. Take, for example, the melancholy of the affluent, whether expressed by the author of Ecclesiastes or by such modern writers as Byron, Turgenev, and Tolstoi. Proceeding from satiety not from want, condemning the feast that has become savourless not the plates which have been too meagrely filled, it is a heavier, less seldom relieved, and more self-engrossed emotion than the melancholy of, say, Shakespeare or the author of Job, men whose periods of prosperity were intermittent and who, therefore, however clamorous on occasion against the injustice of life, were sustained by hope instead of being weighed down by repletion. The melancholy of the affluent is, however, qualified by a certain complacency; for to be exempted from the general struggle cannot but induce, even in the most sensitive natures, a self-satisfaction which may be frankly indulged, as by Gibbon, or may, as in Tolstoi and Ruskin, be overlaid with a sense of guilt which is presently dispersed in advice to society how to reconstitute itself on a more equitable basis.

In his slight but delightful and distinctive way Logan Pearsall Smith, who a short time ago at the age of eighty, exemplified very clearly the main characteristics of a writer possessed of independent means. His father was a wealthy American Quaker who, as Pearsall Smith narrates in his autobiography, *Unforgotten Years*, came to England on an evangelist mission and enjoyed a great success among the more earnest members of the English upper classes. The youthful Logan accompanied him, and doubtless absorbed from this experience, if not quite consciously at the time, the important truth that it is much easier to gratify social ambitions in a foreign country than in one's own. In his early twenties, exchanging



a business career in the States for the pursuit of culture on a competence, he sailed for England, which became his home and where he was eventually naturalized.

His principal ambition was to master the art of prose in the land of Walter Pater, the greatest literary influence in his early years. Both this ambition and his social aspirations were served by a period at Oxford, which he has described in *Unforgotten Years* with subtly blended appreciation and mild malice. To his delicate intelligence, if one may judge from his memoirs and from his volumes of *Trivia*, socially impressive institutions and persons, and social life generally, presented themselves as often as not in a rather absurd light; but emotionally and imaginatively he was drawn to them, for his literary and philological interests were not by themselves sufficient to fill the life of an unmarried expatriate with no definite occupation.

The aphorisms and little vignettes of *Trivia*, a journal which he kept over many years and issued from time to time in slender volumes, perfectly conveyed the varying moods of an existence divided between aesthetic impressions, ruminations on the nature of things, and more or less satisfying social encounters. At first, under the influence of Pater, he aimed at a deliberately poetic prose, the charm of which was evanescent, as, for example, in a meditation on Happiness with its picture of a Golden World 'hidden, not (as poets have fancied) in far seas or beyond inaccessible mountains, but here close at hand, if one could find it, in some undiscovered valley. Certain grassy lanes seem to lead through the copses thither, and the wild pigeons talk of it behind the woods.' But there are not many of these set pieces, most of the entries being, though never slipshod, informal and conversational in tone. In one mood he pleases himself, as he saunters along Piccadilly or Bond Street, with the Berkeleian notion that matter is an illusion; in another he reflects, looking out of the window: 'Yes, there it still was, the old External World, still apparently quite unaware of its own lack of existence.' There are moments when he is enraptured by the flavour of social success, or looks back nostalgically to the 'delicious Doorstep Terror of youth, outside a great house'; other moments when he feels himself 'a twittering shadow, a make-believe', and recoils from the night which confronts him after an amusing party: "A delightful evening", I reflected; "the nicest kind of people.

What I said about finance and philosophy impressed them; how they laughed when I imitated a pig squealing!"'

But soon after: "God, it's awful!" I muttered. "I wish I was dead."

In the later volumes of *Trivia* old age is approaching and the conflict between complacency and a melancholy sometimes verging on despair deepens. Old age he discovers to be not a 'gradual decline, but a series of falls, full of sorrow, from one ledge to another', and old men not venerable and serene but tetchy and full of fears: 'It seemed so simple when one was young, and new ideas were mentioned, not to grow red in the face and gobble': 'To deprive elderly people of their bogeys is as brutal as snatching from babies their big stuffed bears.' During the greater part of his life he had dismissed any transcendental view of reality with the impatience of a hedonist who thinks that he should be allowed to indulge himself as he pleases in this world on the tacit understanding that he resigns his claim to another. 'All kinds of supernaturalisms are most distasteful to me', he wrote in his middle fifties; but ten years later, though he can still console himself with the reflection that there are few sorrows, however poignant, in which a good income is of no avail, he reveals from time to time a growing uneasiness about the validity of the premises in accordance with which he had arranged his life. There is a good deal of transcendental speculation implied in such a reflection as 'How furious it makes people to tell them of the things which belong to their peace', or in such a question as 'Why are happy people not afraid of Death, while the insatiable and the unhappy so abhor that grim feature?'

But it takes more than passing qualms, however painful, to uproot the mental habits of a long lifetime. In the same year as the last of the *Trivia* volumes appeared, Pearsall Smith published *On Reading Shakespeare*, a brilliant and delightfully written tribute to Shakespeare as seen from the standpoint of an epicurean aesthete. To Pearsall Smith Shakespeare is not a revelation of life but an enchantment in which he can forget 'the Sahara of our age'. He expressly disclaims any interest in Shakespeare as a human being, leaving others to explore, if they will, 'the dark problem of the Dark Period'. His Shakespeare has no family, no country, no occupation, but floats above life, distilling from his aerial meditations 'a

secret rhythm, a cadence, a delicate and dream-like music which is, for me, the loveliest poetry in the world'. To Shakespeare as to Prospero, Pearsall Smith surmises, existence often seemed like an unsubstantial pageant, and ourselves as dreams. But *The Tempest* does not close on this note, for Prospero's last words are:

And now my ending is despair  
Unless I be relieved by prayer,  
Which pierces so, that it assaults  
Mercy itself, and frees all faults.

## HIGH LIFE IN VICTORIAN FICTION

IF it did nothing else for burdened mankind, the French Revolution did at any rate enrich and deepen the appeal of the upper classes to the novel-reading public. In the eighteenth century aristocrats were 'the Great', which was impressive rather than romantic. The guillotine brought the Olympians down to earth, and while not really impairing their divinity won for them the sympathy due to human suffering. Royal though ruined, victim yet victor—that, more or less, was the formula with which, when the aristocrat emerged on the other side of the French Revolution, Byron in *Childe Harold* launched him on his dazzling pilgrimage through the popular literature of the nineteenth century.

In *Novels of High Society from the Victorian Age*, a massive tome of nine hundred closely printed pages, Mr. Anthony Powell has culled three of the most luxuriant blooms from the hothouse of Victorian romanticism. His first choice is Benjamin Disraeli's *Henrietta Temple*, which appeared in the year of Queen Victoria's accession. Disraeli, who had already published seven books, was now thirty-three, he had just entered Parliament, and, as he had recently told Lord Melbourne, was resolved one day to become Prime Minister. That day, except to Disraeli, seemed unlikely ever to dawn, for though his novels and his dandyism had attracted a good deal of attention, it was not of a kind to further his political ambitions. Even in the eighteen-thirties green velvet trousers and a black satin shirt were considered excessive, and although in later years Disraeli wrote to the papers to say that he had never worn green trousers the impression that he had lingered on. Nor did his novels help him. After he had held high office he was taken seriously as a writer, after his first premiership his wit and wisdom were universally applauded, and after his second premiership and death his literary genius was no longer in dispute. But in his early years these collateral aids to appreciation were lacking, and, judged bleakly on their actual contents, the novels of his first period seemed designed solely to add to their author's

bank balance by purveying a diluted Byronism to a generation nicely balanced between the licence of the Regency and the domestic ideals of the Victorians. Ferdinand Armine, the hero of *Henrietta Temple*, starts off with the full Byronic equipment. He is of ancient lineage, and has a fiery imagination, violent passions and a daring soul. He glitters in brilliant circles, he is followed by the report of strange and flattering adventures, he breaks into profuse expenditure, and seems, in short, to be storing up endless difficulties both for himself and for the wealthy cousin whom he has decided to marry so that he may be in a position to disencumber the family estate of its mortgages and, incidentally, settle his personal debts (feelingly described by himself as 'private cares of my own of no slight nature'). Then he meets Henrietta Temple, a beautiful girl, of ancient lineage of course, but relatively penniless. From that moment he is a changed man. No more strange and flattering adventures, nothing but an unalterable, an at times even monomaniacal, fidelity to Henrietta. There are complications; Henrietta, on a false, though in all the circumstances plausible, report of his unfaithfulness, becomes engaged to a wealthy peer, and Ferdinand's creditors get him into a sponging-house. But all ends happily on the emotional plane, and satisfactorily on the economic, for Henrietta unexpectedly becomes one of the greatest heiresses in the country. To say that there is no reality at all in the book would be to pay even Disraeli's intelligence and self-command too high a compliment. The sponging-house is real enough, there is an astute moneylender with social ambitions who might have struck Mr. Gladstone as like someone or other, and there is a very genuine ring in Ferdinand's cry of agony when he hears that Henrietta, now betrothed to another, has come into a vast fortune.

The second book chosen by Mr. Powell, *Guy Livingstone*, was published in 1857 and enjoyed a huge success. In the twenty years since the Queen's accession the middle classes had expanded enormously in wealth and importance, but half-way through the 'fifties the Crimean War stimulated a latent distaste for their prudential outlook and sober domestic routine. Kingsley's *Westward Ho!* was one sign of the growing restlessness; Tennyson's *Maud*, with its denunciation of trade and dithyrambic approval of 'loud war by land and sea', was another; *Guy Livingstone* was a third. Not much is known of

its author, George Lawrence, but one may reasonably assume that he put a good deal of himself into Frank Hammond, the faithful friend and chronicler of Guy Livingstone. Hammond says of himself that he is weak in body and nerve, and one can deduce from his narrative that he is not particularly strong in the head. So he is well equipped to picture in loving detail and with meek adoration an embodiment of pagan force and arrogance. Guy Livingstone is the bearer of an ancient name, heir to a large estate, and free from money cares, handing a blank cheque to a friend for his honeymoon expenses and showing a faintly disdainful surprise when the cheque is filled in for a meagre thousand pounds. After trampling his way through school and Oxford, where he batters a prize-fighter into 'a heap of blind, senseless, bleeding humanity', Livingstone takes a commission in the Life Guards. Even as a boy there was a set sternness about his lips and lower jaw, and this effect, Hammond noticed, was increased after he joined the Life Guards by a heavy moustache which 'fell over his lips in a black cascade'. A very different person, one would say, from Dean Farrar's Eric, whose history appeared in the year after Livingstone's. Yet no one in a popular novel can escape the spirit of his age. A deadly duellist, an intrepid rider to hounds, a heavy player, an irresistible lover, with never fewer than two affairs in hand, Livingstone nevertheless becomes, like Eric, a prize for which the powers of good and evil contend. As Russell, Eric's good angel, and Brigson, 'a fore-front fighter in the Devil's battles', struggle for Eric's soul, so Constance Brandon and the seductive enchantress Flora Bellasys struggle for Livingstone's. The odds seem against Constance, in spite of her rare loveliness, for she is an ardent ritualist, and to go to church with a beautiful woman is foreign to Livingstone's temperament. The reader senses his increasing restlessness, and is less taken aback than Constance when Guy and Flora, withdrawing into a conservatory heavy with tropical scents, are surprised in a long embrace. But the last round goes to Constance, who, as is usual with virtuous characters in Victorian fiction, lacks physical stamina. Sinking into a rapid decline, she sends for Guy on her death-bed, and makes him promise to break with Flora and to become gentler and more unselfish. Having broken with Flora in an interview marked by even more than his usual ferocity, Livingstone

goes for a Mediterranean cruise with Hammond, who takes it as a sign of his friend's growing gentleness when Livingstone, instead of smashing in a recalcitrant Italian's face, lifts the man up by his throat, holds him suspended against a wall, and eventually lets him drop, green with terror, but unhurt. The further efflorescence of Livingstone's kindlier side is delayed by an episode in which a man who has killed one of Guy's friends collapses into idiocy under the menace of his pitiless thirst for vengeance. But all ends well. Livingstone, fatally injured in the hunting-field, expresses himself in such penitent and affectionate terms on his death-bed that Hammond breaks down, and when all is over leans his forehead against the corpse's cheek, sobbing like a helpless child. Guy's grave, even in the depth of winter, is strewn with the choicest of exotic flowers. The hand that strews them is Flora's.

Ouida's *Moths*, the third novel in this volume, appeared in 1889, the year when Zola published *Nana* and Ibsen was writing *Ghosts*. The sun of Byron was setting at last. Ouida (Louise Ramé, as Mr. Powell accurately but rather unkindly calls her, Louise de la Ramée as she preferred to call herself) did not belong to high society by birth, and, though her novels brought her into contact with it, her unattractive appearance, rasping voice and bad manners debarred, or saved, her from the vicious and hollow triumphs enjoyed by the corrupt and cankered beauties whom she flays in all her writings with such unflagging zest. To balance matters, she was accustomed, by the exercise of a powerful imagination, to identify herself with her proudly innocent and peerlessly beautiful heroines. When *Moths* came out, Mr. Powell tells us, Ouida wore the white gown of its martyred heroine, Vera Herbert, who, to save her mother's honour, marries Prince Zouroff, a vile profligate of immense wealth and a lineage more ancient than the Romanoffs. Vera's innocence, the magnet which attracts Prince Zouroff, casts a spell no less potent, though incomparably more elevated, on Corrèze, the great opera-singer, whose father, son of a marquis beggared in the Terror, had tended goats on the pastures fronting the Pennine Alps across the valley of the Rhone. An unspoken love springs up between Corrèze, weary of countless conquests, and Vera, surrounded by flatterers, destitute of friends. Now here, now there, by a rushing river in the Austrian Alps, in

a lonely church on the bleak Polish plains, the divine voice of Corrèze rises unexpectedly to comfort her sad heart. People begin to talk, there is a duel, and Prince Zouroff shoots Corrèze in the throat.

High above the Rhone valley, in an old house, simple yet noble and filled with the gifts of kings and emperors and cities, Corrèze and Vera live alone. Some hundreds of miles to the north-west Zola is poring over the latest statistics of infanticide. Up there in Norway Ibsen is collating his notes on general paralysis of the insane. No matter. Corrèze is leaning over the stone balustrade of his terrace, some pages of written music, the score of an opera, on a marble table near by. Beside him stands Vera, a serious sweet luminance in her eyes. The air is pure and clear as crystal, strong as wine. A cattle maiden sings on the high grass slopes, a freshwater fisherman answers the song from his boat on the lake below.



## THE ENGLISH IN SWITZERLAND

NATIONAL character is a reality which changes with extreme slowness, but the ideas nations have of one another vary with every shift in the political and social scene. In the last fifty to sixty years Russia, for example, has been, as viewed from England, a corrupt autocracy of savage Grand Dukes and cowed moujiks; a great Christian empire full of simple peasants worshipping their Little Father, the Tsar; a waste land of sad and sensitive intellectuals, ill-adapted to the demands of practical life; a proletarian paradise of starry-eyed mechanics, and a bloody Mongol tyranny. Within the same space of time the Germans have been a simple, home-loving, musical people, an eruption of blond beasts, a crude and gullible but fundamentally well-meaning race, and a horde of sadistic robots; the Japanese have soared to an elevation of knightly duty and patriotic devotion where Bayard himself would have breathed with some difficulty, and have dropped to a level of conduct at which a missing link would raise its eyebrows; and the French have switched to and fro between being our traditional enemies (Gallic, volatile, and incalculable) and our natural allies (Latin, logical, and steadfast). Among the smaller countries, the two which of late years have undergone the most notable transformations are Switzerland and Ireland. Erin, the distressful island, trampled under the bloody hoof of the Saxon invader, now figures in the English imagination as a snug retreat from the harsh realities of a racked and tortured world, the one place where such of Britannia's sons as are able to afford the prices charged by Kathleen ni Houlihan can be certain of a square meal. The neutrality of Switzerland, on the other hand, has raised her credit, for while Ireland was protected by her ancient enemy, Switzerland got through with no outside help. An oasis of sanity, lifted as high morally as physically above her raving neighbours; an island of light in a dark and angry sea—that is how Switzerland, a short time ago a land of hotel-keepers hat in hand to the foreign tourist, now appears to us.

At this opportune moment, which the recent ban on

continental travel should protract for a little longer yet, Arnold Lunn has brought out an admirable and well-annotated anthology of English writing about Switzerland,<sup>1</sup> ranging from a Canterbury monk's concise and hostile account of crossing the Alps in the winter of 1188 to the expansive and nostalgic reminiscences of contemporary ski-runners.

As early as Francis Bacon, the ability of the Swiss to live at peace with one another had impressed the outside world. 'We see the Swiss last well', Bacon wrote, 'in spite of their diversity of religion and canton.' Addison attributed their internal harmony to their heavy, phlegmatic temper, and Bishop Burnet, while praising their sincerity, also found them heavy. But Abraham Stanyan, British Minister in Switzerland early in the eighteenth century, and therefore in closer contact with the Swiss than Englishmen travelling for pleasure, thought they had more wit and perhaps less sincerity than the world allowed them, and concealed some of the subtleties of the Italian under the frankness of the German.

Meanwhile, their scenery was beginning to divert attention from their sincerity, real or imagined. In the middle of the eighteenth century William Windham, after a five hours' climb from Chamonix, enjoyed 'the Pleasure of beholding Objects of an extraordinary Nature', presumably the glaciers and mountains of the Mont Blanc range. By the seventeenth-eighties 'the fashion of viewing the mountains and glaciers', as Gibbon calls it, was well established, much to the annoyance of Gibbon, who, like many later Englishmen, excluded himself from the generalization that Switzerland is spoilt by the influx of foreigners. The French Revolution sent Gibbon back to England, and the next Englishman of note to visit Switzerland was Shelley, who, profiting by Napoleon's imprisonment in Elba, hurried across France with Mary Godwin and Jane Clairmont to breathe by the lake of the Four Cantons the air which had filled the freedom-loving lungs of William Tell. Two years later Byron took Switzerland in hand, and popularized it throughout Europe and the States as an Arcadia, half soothing and half savage, fit setting for a broken heart and an untamed will. Yet even in 1816 the illusion that he was alone in Switzerland (except for a few chamois-hunters and piping shepherds in the middle distance) was difficult to sustain. He was much chagrined on his

<sup>1</sup> *Switzerland in English Prose and Poetry* By Arnold Lunn.

way back from the Castle of Chillon, by meeting a carriage of English people, one of them, a woman, fast asleep; and at Chamonix another Englishwoman dislocated his confrontation of Mont Blanc by remarking to a companion, 'Did you ever see anything more *rural*?' Four or five months of this kind of thing were as much as he could stand, and in the autumn of 1816 he left Switzerland for good.

Byron's exclusive sensibility was taken over and elaborated by Ruskin, whose account in his autobiographical fragment, *Præterita*, of his first journey to the Alps as a boy of fourteen opens with a contrast between the modern steam-puffed tourists, dragged like cattle or felled timber through the countries they imagine themselves visiting, and himself and his parents proceeding at their leisure in their travelling carriage. The points he especially notes about this carriage are its stateliness, abashing to plebeian beholders, its cushions, fitted where they could not slip, and its corners rounded for more delicate repose. A high-class courier, he says, accompanied them, his function being to save the family unbecoming cares and mean anxieties and to ensure that they should visit not only the proper sights in each town but also those not accessible to the vulgar. After all this, the magnificent rhetoric in which Ruskin clothes his first view of the Alps ('the seen walls of lost Eden could not have been more beautiful to us; not more awful, round heaven, the walls of sacred Death') is not quite magnificent enough to exclude a glimpse of the high-class courier standing modestly in the background, with a faint air of having provided a spectacle just a little beyond the resources of even his most gifted colleagues.

The effect of railways was to place Switzerland within the reach of persons who had less money and leisure than Ruskin's father, a wealthy wine merchant; and in the 'fifties the English began to climb mountains. Mont Blanc and the Jungfrau had been climbed already, but it was in the 'fifties and 'sixties that most of the first great ascents were made. The mid-Victorian mountaineers were drawn almost entirely from the upper middle-classes. Neither the aristocrat, who preferred more expensive and decorative amusements, nor the country gentleman, who had his hunting and shooting, was attracted to the Alps. To struggle up a big peak between Swiss guides required endurance and fortitude rather than nerve and skill, and was therefore within the range of most dons and

schoolmasters, clerics, barristers, scientists, and editors of important journals. At the same time it was sufficient of an adventure to satisfy the instinct for the arduous and the heroic buried under the ponderous comfort and security of their lives at home; and a deeper instinct was also satisfied, the wild and beautiful world into which they penetrated stirring doubts of Darwin among the rationalists and a sense of divinity among the divines.

The Alpine Club, founded in 1858, was assailed with peevish insolence by Ruskin, whose vanity was irritated by a pursuit which reflected on his own effeminacy: 'The Alps themselves, which your own poets used to love so reverently, you look upon as soaped poles in a bear-garden, which you set yourselves to climb and slide down again with "shrieks of delight".' A young institution, composed of members with an innate bias towards the seemly and the accepted, the Alpine Club was abashed by this attack from a man of Ruskin's established position. But it soon recovered, having much in its favour, the glamour with which it was increasingly invested by people who did not climb, and the solid worth of its members, none of whom was less than respectable and many of whom, as the century advanced, reached the top of their various professions. One might put the high summer of the club round about 1900, by which date the soaped-pole untouchables of the 'fifties had been transformed into Brahmins, new untouchables being provided by conducted parties drawn from the middle and lower middle-classes. A happy time, not destined to last. In the changed conditions of twentieth-century Switzerland, a reputation for heroism can no longer be bought in the cheapest market and sold in the dearest; for climbing has become an intricate and perilous art, and ski-ing, unknown in Victorian Switzerland, is a sport in which athletes have a distinct advantage over the unathletic.

The pleasure of reading accounts of climbs, however difficult, and of ski-races, however thrilling, is probably a good deal less acute than the pleasure of writing them. Their interest is apt to expire at the last full stop. They do not reverberate in the imagination. Nevertheless, this anthology contains several expressions of the theory that, as Leslie Stephen puts it, the glories in which the mountain Spirit reveals himself to his true worshippers are only to be gained by the appropriate service of climbing, or, as Mr. R. L. G. Irving puts it, that

mountains reveal their intimate charm only to those who are not content to sit at their feet and watch but are determined to win them. Implicit in this theory is the curious assumption that an object cannot be a symbol of beauty or terror until the observer has established physical contact with it. To test this assumption one need only compare Leslie Stephen and Dorothy Wordsworth describing a similar Alpine effect. 'No sight in the Alps', Stephen writes, 'is more impressive than the huge rocks of a black precipice suddenly frowning out through the chasms of a storm-cloud. But grand as such a sight may be from the safe verandas of the inn at Grindelwald, it is far grander in the silence of the central Alps amongst the savage wilderness of rocks and snow.' 'While I lay on my bed,' Dorothy Wordsworth writes, 'the terrible solitudes of the Wetterhorn were revealed to me by fits—its black chasms, and snowy, dark grey summits. All night, and all day, and for ever, the Vale of Meiringen is sounding with torrents.' Leslie Stephen is self-consciously flat because he is pre-occupied with his own mingled sensibility and manliness. Dorothy Wordsworth is spontaneously poetic because the torrents and precipices beyond her bedroom window imaged the desolation of her last years, now beginning to close in upon her.

AS I was too late in applying for a review copy of Harold Nicolson's essay on *The English Sense of Humour*, Mr. Edward Shanks was so very kind as to comply with my suggestion that I should call at 32, Great Ormond Street, and examine one of the three copies still at the Dropmore Press. Bound in full buckram with a gold band on the inside of the cover, set in 16-point Bembo and printed by hand on hand-made paper, it was a noble volume which Mr. Shanks's secretary, Mrs. Santhouse, laid before me; but it had the drawback, from my standpoint, of being unopened, as bibliophiles express it, or uncut, in the loose terminology of the man in the street. Even so, half the book was accessible to me, and there were in addition many pages of which, as they were unopened only at the top, I managed to get the gist, though perhaps at some risk of contracting a permanent squint. So I have some ground for hoping that I have missed nothing essential to Harold Nicolson's argument; and, to obviate the prolixity of diffidence and the circumlocutions of doubt, I shall treat this hope as a certainty.

Mr. Nicolson quotes with approval Dr. Sully's view that the sense of humour is found only in races of Teutonic stock. The extreme temperamental lucidity and the habit of precise and rapid thought found in the Latin races create, Mr. Nicolson says, a climate less favourable to the growth of a sense of humour than the misty imprecisions of the Teutonic lands. His remarks on English humour may therefore be taken as applying to humour in general, the English disposition providing in his belief a more fruitful soil for humour than that of any other people.

Humour to Mr. Nicolson is essentially a method of self-defence, a device for taking the sting out of life. Contrasting it with wit, he says that wit has an object, is critical and aggressive, and requires an audience; humour has no object, is a shield not a sword, economizes instead of entailing intellectual and psychic effort, is private, contemplative, ruminating, and conciliatory. Contrasting it with irony and

satire, he prefers their 'nobler and more didactic purpose', for humour, he says, is indulgent to frailty and cannot be troubled to correct it. Kindly to weakness, humour is hostile to all superiorities, whether good or evil, and tries to reduce their stature by ridicule, converting Hitler, for example, into a talkative little man with an absurd moustache, and disparaging culture and intellect in such catchwords as 'high-brow' and 'the Oxford accent'. Neither this world nor the next owes anything to the humorist, for while the mystic concentrates on the infinite, and the realist on the finite, the humorist is amiably tolerant of both and sees absurdity everywhere. 'One cannot have a sense of humour unless one be without conscience or responsibility,' Mr. Nicolson quotes from Goethe, adding, however, that the examples of Lincoln and Winston Churchill show that humour does not always have a debilitating effect upon character. Yet (he concludes), though humour may be a rather childish, self-protective, and indolent quality, it is assuredly benevolent, conciliatory, kind, a lubricant in our anxious lives, an unguent for our wounds.

Within its limits this diagnosis is sound, but the limits are narrow. There are, broadly speaking, three levels at which humour operates. I once asked a Russian, who had worked for some years with Stalin, whether Stalin had a sense of humour, and, if so, what it was like. After reflecting for quite a time, his sombre expression relaxed a little, a glint came into his eyes, and he replied, 'If you were leaving this room, and absent-mindedly walked into that door, striking it with your nose, then Stalin would laugh.' This is humour as Hobbes understood it when he wrote that 'the passion of laughter is nothing else but a sudden glory, arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves by comparison with the infirmity of others, and with our own formerly'. On the next level, the one to which Mr. Nicolson confines himself, it is the victim who laughs, not the spectator; the motive behind his laughter being twofold, to anticipate and therefore neutralize the derision of the bystanders and to minimize to himself the shock he has sustained. Now to deal with a single mischance in this way is well enough; but Mr. Nicolson's case against the humorist is that he is a feeble though astute fellow who, temperamentally disposed to bump his nose on doors, gives this tendency full rein, so as to flatter the bystanders with their superior adjustment to reality, and

conciliate them with his whimsically rueful acceptance of his own imbecility.

This personal self-conscious use of humour is discernible in *As You Like It*, which Shakespeare wrote in a mood of self-pity, and appears, fully developed, in Laurence Sterne, the first writer to smile of set purpose through his tears. During the opening decades of the nineteenth century the 'laughing tear', as Sterne's German pupil Heine called it, flowed freely throughout Europe, and though, as the century advanced, the emotional climate became less moist, humorists, especially in England, continued to dramatize themselves as ingenuous, unworldly creatures, babes in a wood which turns out to be not half so bad as some people pretend; for this kind of humorist is, as Mr. Nicolson points out, an optimist, desiring mental and emotional ease for himself and ready to purvey it to others.

That humour, like any other faculty, can be exploited for personal ends is no reflection on it. It is not humour which has a debilitating effect upon character (Lincoln's and Churchill's excepted), but lack of character which has a debilitating effect upon humour. As a diagnosis of the abuse of humour in the last one hundred and fifty years, Mr. Nicolson's essay is excellent. There is hardly an intellectual or emotional flaw from Sterne to Mark Twain, from Heine to J. M. Barrie and J. K. Jerome, on which it does not touch. But of humour on the level where it is impersonal and disinterested, an illumination of reality not a refuge from it, Mr. Nicolson has nothing to say. On this level the humorist is not a Neapolitan beggar displaying his sores for alms, or a tearful zany the misty imprecisions of whose mind are reflected in his quavering picture of the external world. He is Cervantes (a Latin) in the prison of Seville dispassionately projecting the lifelong conflict between his illusions and his belated common sense in the persons of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza; Molière (another Latin) holding the balance evenly between the egotisms of solitude and society; Shakespeare showing in Falstaff that no wit or humour, however rich, can triumph in the end against the nature of things; Fielding as detached in his description of the watermen who jeered at his wasted and horrifying appearance when he was carried aboard for the voyage to Lisbon as in his portrait of Jonathan Wild the Great.

It is natural that those who are interested in preserving or



intensifying the illusions which justify human egotism to itself and consecrate the vanities and follies that lay life waste should be hostile to humour King John's

That idiot laughter,  
A passion hateful to my purposes,

is echoed in the remark Mr. Nicolson quotes from Goethe, a marvellous poet in his inspired hours but in his uninspired a worshipper of Napoleon; in Nietzsche's imprecation on *Don Quixote*, which the dreamer of the Superman condemned for its derision of all noble effort; and to descend to lesser and later persons, in the efforts of George Moore and his disciples to make the English novel safe for the kind of distinguished worldling they hope themselves to be. To these names the author of *Some People* must now, provisionally but not, one hopes, permanently, be added, for he has certainly in this essay diminished humour to a point at which even King John would have passed it as completely innocuous to his purposes

## WILLIAM GERHARDI

ONE day in the early spring of 1935 William Gerhardi, with whom I had spent the evening, accompanied me back to Queensborough Terrace, where I was staying in a boarding-house. Remembering how a few weeks earlier he had accompanied me back to a boarding-house in Torrington Square, and how our conversation on the pavement outside, prolonged till nearly three in the morning, had awakened everyone in the front of the house and had even got one unfortunate out of bed and into his trousers, before he realized that he had not overslept, I now suggested that we should keep moving. Accordingly we walked down Queensborough Terrace, along by the Park, up Porchester Terrace, through a passage-way into Queensborough Terrace, down it again, and so on, until, as we emerged for the seventh time from the passage-way and turned yet once more towards the Park, a long-drawn howl from an open window high above us, a howl not of physical pain but, beyond doubt, of excruciating mental anguish, struck us dumb. It was quite clear what had provoked it. Seven times our voices had died comfortingly away in the distance, seven times they had become audible again, swelled and reached their greatest volume. Ironically enough, in the circumstances, the theme of our conversation or monologue was the idea underlying Gerhardi's novel *Resurrection*, which had been published a few months previously. This idea, he said, he had now formulated as 'Nothing is until it is over', and in the course of our circular perambulation he diversified it with many dialectical subtleties and enriched it with many beautiful and consolatory images; but, inevitably, it was the last idea to convince, still less to attract, someone waiting for a nuisance to abate, and hence, perhaps, the note of passionate repudiation in our victim's cry as 'Nothing *is* until it is *over*' rang out once more in the silent night.

The growth of this idea can be traced through Gerhardi's work from his first novel, *Futility*, which came out in 1922 and has just been republished.<sup>1</sup> Most of *Futility* was written

<sup>1</sup> Messrs. Macdonald have recently issued *Futility*, *The Polygons*, and *My Sinful Earth* in their collected uniform edition of the works of William Gerhardi.

at Oxford, to which Gerhardt went on his return from Siberia, where he had spent two years with the British Military Mission. His war service had been heterogeneous. The son of a wealthy English manufacturer settled in St. Petersburg, he came to England in his late teens, to train for a commercial career, and joined the army at the close of 1915 as a trooper in the Scots Greys. He had been studying Wilde to improve his English style, and arrived at the cavalry barracks in York, he narrates in *Memoirs of a Polyglot*, with longish hair, a languid blasé look and an elegant cane—an appearance not, he says, enhanced by the khaki armlet he was wearing under the Derby recruiting scheme. The romantic impulse which had attracted him towards the cavalry did not long survive the labour of learning to ride, the irksomeness of looking after his horse, and the differences which were constantly developing between himself and the squadron sergeant-major. So he applied for a commission, was posted to the staff of the British Military Attaché in Petrograd, and, arriving there with an enormous sword, bought second-hand in Charing Cross Road, was well received as one who had roughed it in the ranks. The outbreak of the Russian Revolution sent him back to England, which he left again in June 1918, and after traversing the United States reached Vladivostock, the base where the British Military Mission established itself. Happier with generals than with sergeant-majors, Gerhardt profited by his two years in Siberia, leaving the army with a handsome gratuity, the rank of captain, an O.B.E., and two foreign decorations. Meanwhile his father, ruined by the Revolution, had returned to England and was living in Bolton, still, though paralysed and dependent on what his courageous wife could earn, the head of a widespread clan which from old habit continued to turn to him in their difficulties, now for the most part acute.

*Futility*, in spite of its title, was not the embittered product of a youth disillusioned by public and private disasters. In the public mind, a cloudy region where only the simplest shapes are discerned with any accuracy, Gerhardt was speedily classified as belonging to the cynical, sophisticated good-time-in-a-bad-world section of the discouraged post-war generation. A severely ascetic code being no part of his impedimenta as a novelist, and his social engagements during some years being numerous enough to entitle him to as much sophistication

as he cared to assume, there seemed to be some grounds for this classification. But really he believed neither in the good time nor the bad world; what most concerned him, as early as *Futility*, being why man was having a bad time in a good world. 'It was not,' he writes in *Resurrection*, 'the aridity of our life, but the awkward way he was tethered to the tree of Time which prevented the dark horse of our inner being from grazing contentedly in the green meadows of life.' What happens in *Futility*, the story of a young Englishman brought up in Russia and an old Russian with wrangling dependants, all of them drifting about in Siberia during the Allied intervention, is inconclusive or absurd or painful or even at times horrifying, but the book itself is free and buoyant, as though sustained by an assurance, not yet quite conscious, of a world contained in this one as a butterfly in a grub, and waiting to be liberated.

In his next novel, *The Polyglots*, this world is more consciously present to his mind.

' "Now do we live after death?" asked my aunt.

' "The answer," said I, "is in the affirmative." "

But the speaker explains that memory does not survive, what lives on being the immortal I, which is none the worse for shedding its memories of this life, a conclusion that does not satisfy his aunt, who cuts the discussion short with—"Well, well. It's time we went into lunch." In *Pending Heaven*, written some years after *The Polyglots*, a coalescence of the two worlds is suggested in a passage at the beginning—"As the little steamer came into sight of the isthmus the sun, like a warm blessing, lit the wide strip of water and kindled a memory in Max Fisher of a state of well-being native and near to him from which he had been sundered. When was it? Where was it? Max Fisher's search for this state of being is the theme of the book; but as each woman who attracts him figures for a time as the custodian of the happiness he is seeking, he becomes more and more involved in the world from which he is trying to escape, until suddenly death sets him free: "The old life that had clung to him damply seemed to have tumbled to pieces like an old shell, a dried-up mould. He felt he was out, out of the narrow house, and could go where he liked, be what he liked. A blue, sunny sky stretched above him, trees fluttered in the breeze and he went, stick in hand, over dell and hill without looking back. And the farther he went the

more clearly he understood that all these things—himself—were but symbols and metaphors of a miracle by whose dim candle he had read in the book of life a sorry page, confused and deceptive: and a nameless usher had closed the book and carried it away.' A year or so later, in *The Memoirs of a Polyglot*, at the close of the chapter devoted to his father's last months and death and the subsequent Odyssey of his father's urn seeking its final resting-place, a chapter of subtly interwoven beauty, feeling and humour, Gerhardt expresses the same conception of immortality as a release from memory and the self. Mr. Jones, he says, is Mr. Jones by virtue of his constant anxiety to be helpful to Mr. Jones, to go out of his way to serve Mr. Jones. Death comes, and all that is left is 'a soul-liberating feeling which cares not two hoots for the late Mr. Jones'. Yet, he continues, there is also the possibility of a Mr. Jones *in excelsis*, a Mr. Jones suffused with memories mellowed by distance into poetry, a Mr. Jones whose uniqueness has been made eternally secure; and it is this conception which, three years later, he developed in *Resurrection*.

*Resurrection* is a bewilderingly rich book, in which it is easy to lose the way. Gerhardt's dialectical genius is freely indulged in much witty, subtle and illuminating discussion of Dunne's *Experiment with Time*; and an astral projection, experienced shortly after he began *Resurrection*, is linked with Dunne to support his central theme, which is also enforced by many references to Proust's image of the vase, containing the forgotten fragrance of past years.

The theme, it may be recalled, is 'Nothing is until it is over'. A man's real life, Gerhardt explains to one of the characters with whom on a warm summer night he has withdrawn from a ball into St. James's Park, is not in his desires, so engrossing till they are realized, nor in his projects, so clear in anticipation, so vague in recollection, but in the feelings and images, irrelevant to his purposes, which float above him as he presses forward, the hound Habit and the bitch Anxiety at his heels, what is left of him by the one being torn to rags by the other. Only in the realm of memory is he safe: 'From here he can retrace his steps in their world and the two dogs cannot touch him; so he lives his life over again, lingering in the roads and lanes through which he had fled with the two angry hounds at his heels, and this time it is good.'

To illustrate his meaning, Gerhardt narrates the story of a

certain year in his life. In this narrative, a masterpiece of imaginative comedy, the humour is rooted in a perception not of what is socially incongruous, humour's usual subject matter, but of what is spiritually incongruous. The habit, which still lingers on, of regarding humour and religious insight as incompatible derives from the Old Testament conception of the divine. In the presence of an angry God, as of an angry employer, schoolmaster or drill-sergeant, the range of humour is necessarily a narrow one. Humour and the universe have enlarged their boundaries together, and the subject matter of humour is now the whole range of temporal experience; for humour in its highest development is the other side of ecstasy, the soul looking back at its strange movements when it was tethered to the tree of Time, as ecstasy is the soul untethered and content. So after the narrative comes the vision—'Dream on, tall elms in windy sunshine. Grow green and young. Oaks, send up your sap through lusty hollows! Trees, stretch out your branches, drink with your leafy lungs the ocean air! And I'll live on. . . .'

## MAX BEERBOHM

A SHORT time ago, in an article on Sir Max Beerbohm in the *Sunday Times*, Miss G. B. Stern fairly took the bit between her teeth, hyperboles flying like sparks as she spurned the ground between her and the goal of immortal renown towards which she was bearing her illustrious though, probably, somewhat anxious rider. Here are some of the sparks: 'As to perfect, that is indeed the right adjective to describe his works. . . . An essayist perfect in style and manner. . . . I would nevertheless select *No. 2, The Pines*, as the *most* perfect of all these. . . . A volume of perfect short stories was *Seven Men*. . . . *A Christmas Garland* is a volume of perfect parodies. . . . *Zuleika Dobson* is a perfect burlesque of university life. . . . *The Happy Hypocrite* is a perfect fable. . . . We were startled to discover that at the microphone, too, Max Beerbohm could easily achieve perfection.' But should anyone suppose that Miss Stern is restricted to the epithet 'perfect' by necessity rather than choice, the following catalogue of Max Beerbohm's chief qualities will confound him: 'fastidious, courteous, exquisite, witty, economical, innocent, yes, innocent, for in him the eternal wisdom of the sage and the incorrigible mischief of the urchin are accompanied by the wide-eyed limpid gaze of a baby cherub.'

Let me stay this runaway steed and help Sir Max to dismount. That will be to his own advantage; for if his devotees, who have recently been overflowing their former reasonable limits, continue to celebrate him as a blend of Solon, Peter Pan, Voltaire and the Chevalier Bayard, they will provoke counter-demonstrations of a kind likely to jar very painfully on Max Beerbohm, who has of late conveyed to us more than once, in his character of a relic from a more gentlemanly age, how rasping he finds these times.

London, when Max Beerbohm arrived there in the 'nineties, shortly before the downfall of Oscar Wilde, had many traps for one who wished to combine the wit, the dandy and the aesthete. But the bad fairy whose gifts to Max Beerbohm

had been elegance and wit and aesthetic perception was foiled in her evil purposes by the good fairy who, murmuring 'tact' in the wide-awake infant's ear, glided from the room with a justifiably complacent smile. The various disasters and misfortunes associated with the names of Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley, Ernest Dowson and Lionel Johnson, and, at the close of this period, John Davidson and Richard Middleton, passed Max Beerbohm by. His pleasures, one learns from his essays, were temperate—travel and society; and his treatment of his public was from the outset skilful, for by exaggerating his poses, and thus suggesting that his affectations were only an affectation, he disarmed, except in the breasts of a few rugged and unimportant journalists, the resentment he would otherwise have aroused. By the age of twenty-five, when he succeeded Bernard Shaw as the dramatic critic of the *Saturday Review*, he was already 'the incomparable Max', the chartered libertine who could be trusted not to take the wrong liberties.

Much of his work has suffered, in varying degrees, from the highly developed social sense which helped him to his early success. It is better to leave out too much than too little, but this principle can be carried too far; though the half in art is greater than the whole, the tenth and fifteenth are considerably smaller. It is especially in his essays, which are concerned chiefly with his personal experiences, that Max Beerbohm suppresses his insight in favour of the charming tolerance and whimsical good feeling proper to a modest worldling and unassuming dandy. When his subject is slight, this manner suits it well, as in *A Point to be Remembered by Very Eminent Men* or *Seeing People Off*, or *Going out for a Walk*. But it is far from adequate to the subject of Miss Stern's favourite essay. No. 2, *The Pines*, is a beautifully composed picture of a poet, a poet's friend, and an understanding stranger; as a record of the actual impressions made by Swinburne and Watts-Dunton on Max Beerbohm when he visited them at Putney it lacks verisimilitude. If Swinburne had 'the eyes of a god and the smile of an elf', he may also have had about him 'something of a beautifully well-bred child'. But that is enough. He cannot also have looked like 'a very great gentleman indeed'. Watts-Dunton is limned less meltingly; he is only 'a great gentleman', with 'something gnome-like about his swarthy and chubbiness'; but the fact that he insisted on holding the centre of the stage and was careful to keep Swinburne out of



the talk—was, in short, as Max Beerbohm no doubt mentally noted at the time, an egotistic bore—is, in the essay, diluted and sugared into: 'I felt I had been right perhaps in feeling that the lesser man was—no, not jealous of the greater whom he had guarded so long and with such love, but anxious that he himself should be as fully impressive to visitors as his fine gifts warranted.'

Oxford had a much worse effect on Max Beerbohm even than Swinburne. There are some amusing gleams scattered over the 335 pages of *Zuleika Dobson*; but detachment is the first condition of humour, and the undergraduate Duke, who is the hero of the novel, is not regarded with detachment by the author, in spite of some brave attempts to tackle him with insouciance. Max Beerbohm's reverence for Oxford and for all that Oxford implies in English life has deprived his fable of any discernible foundation in reality. Or is it possible that in making all the undergraduates (with the exception of Noaks, a dwarfish squinting plebeian) drown themselves for love of Zuleika, Max Beerbohm meant to suggest that the worship of beauty at Oxford is a passion which may under due provocation blaze into a delirium? If so, he has certainly earned his Hon. D.Litt. (Oxon.).

For artists and literary men, when not both alive and illustrious, Max Beerbohm has no excessive reverence, and his best work, both with pen and pencil, has been inspired by their appeal to his subtle and often exquisite comic sense. What he could have made of Swinburne and Watts-Dunton can be guessed from what he has made of Goethe in *Quia Imperfectum*, Browning and Ibsen in *A Recollection*, and, among his caricatures, Tennyson reading *In Memoriam* to Queen Victoria, and Matthew Arnold being upbraided for levity by his niece, the future Mrs. Humphry Ward. In *A Christmas Garland* he carried parody, not as burlesque but as a form of literary criticism, almost as far as it will go. It is said that Arnold Bennett, after reading *Scruts*, laid down his pen for some weeks. No critic, employing the usual methods, could have produced that result. Equally good, if not equally effective, were the parodies of Henry James, John Galsworthy, Hilaire Belloc, and Bernard Shaw. A single sentence, from Shaw's *Preface to 'Snt. George: A Christmas Play'*, will illustrate Max Beerbohm's genius in this field: 'Nothing could have been easier for me (if I were someone else) than to perform my task

in that God-rest-you-merry-gentlemen-may-nothing-you-dismay spirit which so grossly flatters the sensibilities of the average citizen by its assumption that he is smart enough to be dismayed by what stares him in the face.'

*A Christmas Garland* was written before the first world war, which cracked the world of Max Beerbohm's youth, with an enriching effect on his work. Hilary Maltby's week-end at Keeb, in *Seven Men*, may not instantaneously bring *King Lear* to the reader's mind, nor would I press the parallel between Maltby's flight from Keeb Hall and Lear's night on the heath. All I would suggest is that the abysses which opened beneath Shakespeare's feet after his early triumphs affected him, in his way, as the earthquake of the war affected Max Beerbohm, in his.

## P. G. WODEHOUSE

IT IS more than forty years since I first read P. G. Wodehouse in *The Captain*, a boy's magazine. In those days his humour was not the all-pervasive element it has since become. The hero of those early stories was a serious young cricketer called Mike; and though in making his central figure an athlete Wodehouse no doubt bore in mind the tastes of his audience, who would not have cared to read about a prodigy of learning, I think that Mike really embodied the qualities he valued most—physical strength and fitness, simplicity of mind, and innocence of spirit. His germinating humour he embodied in a youth called Psmith, who at a pinch could knock up runs or knock down a villain as briskly as Mike, but who even when least detached in act still remained detached in feeling, a remote and invulnerable spectator of the human scene.

Unlike Psmith, Mike was vulnerable, and one of the later stories in which he appears shows him cut off from cricket by the necessity to earn a living as a bank clerk, a situation which no doubt reflected Wodehouse's occasional despondency in the first years after leaving school. But success came quickly to Wodehouse, and as his difficulties vanished the Mike element in his writing dwindled and the Psmith expanded. So far as his work was concerned, this change was very much to the good, for his Mike stories suggest that his genius would have been depressed, not enriched, by prolonged anxiety and strain, and that he needed the ringside, not the arena, to bring his gifts to full fruition. Cushioned against the shocks of life in such comfortable fastnesses as his villa at Le Touquet, he mined the inexhaustible riches of his comic invention at his leisure; and, being by nature simple and friendly, escaped the extremes into which other writers have been betrayed by continued success and soft living. His humour never became hard or sickly; the occasional touches of false sentiment, distorted shadows of the emotion he had admitted into his work in the days of Mike, grew more and more rare, and by his middle forties, when he was writing about Jeeves and Bertie Wooster, Ukridge and Mr. Mulliner, he was in complete control of the

world in which his unique creations had their being. Balthazar Gérard, the assassin of William of Orange, is said to have been immune to pain and to have chatted of this and that while his executioners were tweaking him with red-hot pincers. Though less insouciant than Balthazar, Bertie Wooster and Ukridge and Mr. Mulliner appear to be similarly immune. There is no pain in their outcries, and sin, like suffering, has no place in their world. Chimp Twist is not really evil, there is no callousness in Ukridge, no trace in Bertie Wooster of the well-bred caddishness which in our fallen world might have been perceptible in him.

Of pure burlesque there is not much in Wodehouse. The prodigal richness of his verbal humour is nourished by his eye for everyday details, and the comic paradise which he unrolled before us in book after book between the two wars fascinated by its likeness as well as its unlikeness to our sinful and suffering planet. A change of mood in the author, one felt, and fantasy would turn into satire, changelings into human beings. But the change did not take place, for Mike was perfectly content as Bertie Wooster, with the remote and invulnerable Psmith transformed into the still more remote and invulnerable Jeeves, the friend and ally into the servant and guardian.

The summer lightning of Wodehouse's humour was especially grateful to all whose eminence made them feel exposed when lightning of the other kind was playing about their heads. He was the favourite reading of Mr. Asquith in hours of relaxation; a doctorate was conferred on him by Oxford University; and the Drones Club was founded in honour of the creator of Bertie Wooster, with the Public Orator of Oxford among its members and Lord Maugham as its president. Those who have been singled out by society for favour and distinction need to be particularly careful not to do anything which by compromising the judgment of their well-wishers may reflect upon their integrity. Wilde attracted general opprobrium, in France as well as in England, for offences which no one troubled about in Verlaine; and Wodehouse, who with complete ingenuousness revealed the motive of self-interest which most men conceal, is still in enforced exile. What was his crime? I am indebted to an officer in the Intelligence for the following facts, which he collected while stationed in Paris in 1944. In the course of his inquiries he saw a good deal of Wodehouse and liked him greatly, but he had

no preconceived bias in his favour. The novels of Wodehouse had not been his favourite reading in hours of relaxation; he was not a member of the Drones Club.

'Mr. Wodehouse', he writes, 'gave five broadcasts from Berlin addressed to America, which country was then not at war with Germany. These broadcasts were entirely non-political, but to give them at all was obviously foolish and irresponsible on his part. Just before giving the broadcasts Mr. Wodehouse had been released from a concentration camp. He was caught by the Germans at Le Touquet when France collapsed, and, like other British nationals, interned, first in France and Belgium, and later at Tost in Silesia. It was inevitable that his release from internment should be connected with the fact that he agreed to broadcast, and it was suggested, and widely believed, that he had made a bargain with the German authorities to broadcast in return for being set at liberty. In fact, no such bargain was made. Mr. Wodehouse's release was unconditional and was due to efforts on his behalf made by influential Americans in Berlin and to his having almost reached his sixtieth birthday. British subjects of sixty years and over were not subject to internment.

'The proposal to broadcast came from Mr. Wodehouse himself. Naturally, the German authorities were delighted and took every advantage of Mr. Wodehouse's political innocence. From their point of view, the mere fact of his speaking from Berlin at all, quite apart from what he actually said, would serve their purpose. No censorship of his script was attempted and no conditions were imposed on his broadcasting, nor was any subsequent attempt made to induce him to serve the interests of German propaganda. If his five broadcasts had been given from London and published in the *Listener*, they would have had a great success. They are in his usual vein and would have delighted all his admirers.'

As always when a popular idol falls, the outcry against Wodehouse was fiercest among those who had been drawn to him less by his genius than by what, in changed conditions, they now recognized as his defect. The world being what it is, lotus-eating is either always a crime or never a crime. But it was only when their own supply of lotus was menaced that a certain class of Wodehouse's admirers suddenly turned upon their idol. There was evil afoot, they cried, and he didn't care. Yet evil did not come into existence with the fall of France

and the Nazi threat to our existence. If it is the business of writers to deal with life as it is, if sin and sorrow must be included in their work, there was plenty of life as it is in the years of Wodehouse's popularity, and more than enough of sin and sorrow.

It would be pedantic to suggest that these considerations should have silenced all expressions of disapproval at the broadcasts from Berlin. But there should be a time-limit to the indulgence of moral indignation, and the appearance of a new book from P. G. Wodehouse provides a suitable occasion for, as Utridge might say, calling the dog off.

*Money in the Bank* shows no signs of having been written in captivity. I see that Mr. G. W. Stonier, reviewing it in the *Observer* under the heading 'Humpty-Dumpty', writes: 'The old fascination has gone; if he hasn't changed, we have.' I find no change either in P. G. Wodehouse or in G. W. Stonier. The humour of Wodehouse is as rich and inexhaustible as ever; the delicate perceptions and sensitive intelligence of Mr. Stonier still hampered by a temperament that, in his less amiable moments, makes him condescend from a height which to others looks like a depression. It is true that Wodehouse has had a great fall, and one might infer from the *Observer* review that if he is to wait for the king's horses and king's men, not to mention the king's sheep, to put him together again, he will have to wait a long time. But public opinion is an incalculable thing, and it may be that, by the time P. G. Wodehouse's next book comes out, people will have ceased to brood on the injury he did himself and will remember only the happiness he has given to others.

calls 'the confident insolence sprouting from systematic reasoning'.

The most dazzling figure in Mr. Wyndham Lewis's narrative is John Wilkes. It would be unfair to Mr. Lewis to suggest that the gusto with which he draws this debauched wit and adventurer is forced, or that it went against the grain with him to fill in with such lavish and brilliantly picturesque detail the world of taverns and bagnios in which this blaspheming rake-hell disported himself. None the less, even the least wary of non-Catholic readers will cock a thoughtful eye when he comes upon 'Wilkes, one might say, is the Eighteenth Century, as Rabelais is the Sixteenth and Aquinas the Thirteenth'. One might also say that Johnson is the Eighteenth Century, as Shakespeare is the Sixteenth and King John the Thirteenth; but that would not suit the author's purpose, which is to extenuate Boswell's frailties and shortcomings as only too comprehensible in one living in a godless and profligate land and century. To counteract the influence of Wilkes and Rousseau, Mr. Lewis says, Boswell 'needed to frequent a strong prehensile intellect coupled with a calm and sweet and absolute sanctity, a Vincent McNabb, to cite a modern example'. Born too soon to come under the spell of Father Vincent McNabb, whose description of Belgium in 1913 as 'the little white ewe lamb of Europe' still lingers pleasantly in my mind, Boswell had to make shift with Johnson and Paoli, who 'were good and great men, but not saints'. He must, however, have had some contact with a Father of sorts, for in his twentieth year he became, though he did not long remain, a Catholic. What a man would have been like, had his life been different from what it was, is a line of inquiry with a strong attraction for biographers more interested in propaganda than in human nature. In his book on R. L. Stevenson, G. K. Chesterton lamented the ill effect on Stevenson of sowing his wild oats in the Calvinistic gloom of Edinburgh instead of in the sane and sunny atmosphere of a Latin Catholic civilization—a piece of special pleading the futility of which might have come home to him had some French Huguenot attributed Maupassant's death from general paralysis of the insane to his misfortune in passing his early years so far from the bracing pieties of Presbyterian family life. Following the example of G. K. Chesterton, whom he deeply admires, Mr. Wyndham Lewis suggests that Boswell, had he been supported

by the profound and indestructible philosophy of Catholicism, would have become an English Montaigne—a transformation which, whatever its other effects, would not have compelled Boswell to any drastic reconstruction of his personal habits, his way of life being in complete harmony with Montaigne's as expressed in 'We must tooth and naile retaine the use of this life's pleasures, which our years snatch from us one after another.' And so it goes on, until we reach the last hours of Boswell, a temptation Mr. Wyndham Lewis could hardly be expected to resist. We do not know, he says, 'what spiritual viaticum he received. . . . and the matter, since it probably decided his fate for all eternity, is naturally of no great interest to modern critics'. Boswell's death was reported to his great friend, Temple, by Boswell's brother David, who wrote: 'May God Almighty have mercy upon his soul, and receive him into his heavenly kingdom'—a strange sentiment to issue from a heretic's lips, but explicable, in Mr. Wyndham Lewis's view, 'as a memory of his long residence in Spain'.

Mr. Wyndham Lewis, naturally poetic and humane, scatters many lively images over his pages, such as: 'Contact with Johnson was exactly like contact with a sociable, highly temperamental lion. You never knew when the purring would stop, for no apparent or conceivable reason, and hideous mangling befall you.' But, like his master Chesterton, he mistakes his weakness for his strength, indulging his partisanship to the detriment of his humanity. It is not, though it is often supposed to be, a sign of good feeling in a biographer to palliate or deny his hero's failings. If A is never to blame, then B, C, and D must divide any odium between them, in accordance with which principle Chesterton in his *Life of Dickens* censured Dickens's mother, let judgment go by default against his wife, and taking Fagin, the boy at the blacking warehouse whose unvarying kindness Dickens repaid by borrowing his name for his most repulsive villain, transformed him into 'a coarse and heavy lad, who had often attacked Dickens on the not unreasonable ground of his being a "gentleman".' Here again Mr. Wyndham Lewis follows Chesterton's example, and, in the incident of Boswell and Mauritius Lowe, betters it. To help Lowe, who was in both senses a poor painter, Johnson gave him a letter to Sir Joshua Reynolds. Boswell came up as Lowe was going off with the letter, and, assuming a cordiality which contrasted strongly



with his previous coolness, took Lowe to a neighbouring coffee-house, ordered him a dish of coffee, and, while Lowe was drinking it, made a copy of the letter. The copy completed, Boswell rose, resumed his air of hauteur, and walked away, leaving Lowe to pay for the coffee. Mr. Wyndham Lewis's comment is: 'Mr. Boswell probably thought ten minutes' continuous affability more than repaid a Bohemian nonentity and an exploiter of Johnson's kindness like Lowe. . . . One really must not spoil these people'—a comment perhaps even more insensitive than Chesterton's on another poor artist, Seymour, the first illustrator of *The Pickwick Papers*, who committed suicide on the morning after his only meeting with Dickens: 'It mattered little now whether Seymour blew his brains out, so long as Dickens blew his brains in.'

Biography, to adapt Wordsworth's saying about poetry, is human nature delineated in tranquillity. Boswell had many faults, including the malice which Mr. Wyndham Lewis so strenuously disclaims on his behalf. He had also many good qualities, which lose much of their outline as they loom through the cloud-rack swirling in the mind of Mr. Wyndham Lewis.

## COUNSELS FOR THE DEFENCE

THE warmth with which a defending counsel expounds his client's case may be inspired solely by sincere affection for his client and disinterested esteem for his virtues. But as a rule partisanship, whether in the courts or within the covers of a biography, draws most of its vigour from self-love in one or other of its innumerable forms, and tends therefore to obscure what it purposes to clarify. Three recently published studies,<sup>1</sup> of Frederick the Great, of Heine, and of Dostoevsky, may serve to illustrate this point.

Dr. Gooch, a distinguished academic historian, treats Frederick with the respectful consideration which academic historians offer indiscriminately to all the great providers of raw material for their work. He appears to have no imaginative realization at all either of the suffering which Frederick caused others, or (the right standpoint for a biographer) of the internal torment which sought relief in making others suffer. Frederick to him is the pedestalled hero whose superb qualities, disputed by the Austrian professors, have been triumphantly vindicated by the Prussian. For Klopp (the chief spokesman, it seems, of the Austrian school) Dr. Gooch has nothing but impatient contempt. Klopp's voice, says Dr. Gooch, 'rises to a scream' over Frederick's unprovoked attack on Silesia; he 'pursues his hated enemy with shrill vituperation to the grave'; his indictment is 'too passionate and too blindly Austrophil to be taken seriously in the academic world'. For a just verdict we must turn to the Prussophil professors, to Ranke, to Droysen, to Treitschke, and, above all, to Koser, whose history of Frederick Dr. Gooch holds to be definitive. 'Koser', he sums up, 'is a trifle more inclined to criticism than Ranke, Droysen, or Treitschke, but his admiration is no less profound. He conveys a sense of the dynamic personality of his hero and emphasizes the permanence of most of his work.'

<sup>1</sup> *Frederick the Great. The Ruler, The Writer, The Man.* By Dr. G. P. Gooch. *Heine: A Biography.* By François Fejto. Translated by Mervyn Savill. *Fyodor Dostoevsky.* By J. A. T. Lloyd.

That Frederick's methods, as applied of late years by his disciples, have not given much satisfaction, outside the academic world, is not altogether overlooked by Dr. Gooch, who occasionally lets fall such a sentence as: 'In the sphere of high politics Frederick bequeathed a sinister tradition of successful aggression, justified, as he believed, by the doctrine of *Raison d'Etat*.' But these cold moments are rare, and his usual tone is one of deep respect warming at times into deferential affection. He speaks of the genuine devotion to the welfare of his subjects which shines through Frederick's *History of the House of Brandenburg*; he calls the first partition of Poland 'the greatest achievement of the latter half of the reign'; he remarks on the veneration and gratitude felt towards Old Fritz 'not only during the sunshine of the Hohenzollern Empire but in the chill gloom of the Weimar Republic and amid the feverish excitement of the Third Reich'; and he rejoices that in the dark days of the Weimar Republic Frederick's praises were sung by 'the lonely exile at Doorn'.

It is a relief to turn from all this to Frederick himself, who at least had enough sensibility not to mistake hell for paradise, and enough sense not to suppose himself a fit object for veneration and gratitude. What Dr. Gooch calls 'the sphere of high politics' Frederick called 'political follies, follies of ambition, follies of interest', things, he says, which ought not to afflict creatures so transient as ourselves. What Dr. Gooch calls 'the sunshine of the Hohenzollern Empire' Frederick might have called a number of things, none of them, one may be sure, exempting the Germans of 1871 to 1918 from his general view of mankind as 'a poor species vegetating on this little atom of mud which we name the world'. As for the love Old Fritz bore his subjects and the value he set upon their love for him, they may both be estimated from his remark, made in his last year, that his people were canaille, who would come crowding into the streets as eagerly to see an old monkey on horseback as himself.

In the opening sentences of his book Dr. Gooch, an honorary Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, and an ex-President of the Historical Association, after jumbling together as men of action who have been denounced by some as arch-destroyers and applauded by others as master-builders Hitler and Masaryk, Mussolini and Cavour, Frederick the Great and Washington, continues: 'Since all of them were house-breakers as well as

architects, it depends on our nationality and ideology which aspect we stress.' In short, there are no absolute standards, there are only political creeds and national prejudices; history exists for the sake of historians; and each new instalment of human suffering signifies merely so much fresh material for professors to work over at their leisure. Moloch or Christ? A slight matter depending on where and when you live. Klopp or Koser? A vitally important question to which the academic world has supplied the correct answer.

Mr. François Fejtó's study of Heine appears from various signs to be the work of a young man. His surprise that Heine's uncle still held himself erect at fifty suggests that he himself is not yet far advanced in the thirties, and a man in middle age would probably long since have resolved the conflict troubling Mr. Fejtó between the feeling that a biographer should be truthful and the feeling that he should not. In his introduction, after wondering if it will 'enhance Heine's reputation to be revealed in all the phases of his existence' and approving Mr. Arthur Koestler's view, expressed in *The Yogi and the Commissar*, that the life and the work of an artist develop on two different planes, and that the latter must be the final yardstick, he drifts across to the opposite standpoint that 'it is impossible to separate the work from the man, from whom in the ultimate analysis it is an emanation'. Writing in this state of indecision, Mr. Fejtó is wavering and inconclusive, picturesque not imaginative, and by softening the shadows in his portrait at the same time dims the lights. The interdependence of a man's life and his work is a truth which those who, like Heine himself, tend to confine their idealism to their writing are naturally reluctant to acknowledge. Mr. Fejtó refers to Heine's defence of the autonomy of art. Let him consider how it would strike him if Christ had spoken of the autonomy of religion, and claimed that men should be judged not by what they practise but only by what they preach.

Mr. J. A. T. Lloyd first wrote on Dostoevsky thirty-five years ago during the phase when Dostoevsky was being hailed in England as a Russian Christ whose sufferings and compassion were alike infinite, an outcast who had found the pearl of great price among murderers and prostitutes, a man of such transcendent genius that even to read him in an English

translation (one gathered from such prospering novelists as Arnold Bennett and the youthful Hugh Walpole) was a soul-transforming and art-transfiguring experience. Since those days Freud and the totalitarians between them have rubbed the bloom off the underworld, literal and metaphorical. Russian Christs are no longer in supply, and Mr. Lloyd, in this new study of Dostoevsky, resembles rather Ney fighting every foot of his retreat across the Russian plains than the imperfectly informed John the Baptist of 1912. He has, he tells us, used material which has been made available since the appearance of his first book. Unfortunately, though comprehensibly enough, he has not welcomed this fresh material. Instead of incorporating it in a larger and more complex view of Dostoevsky than his original one, he neither accepts it fully nor rejects it vigorously, and in passing vents a good deal of ill humour on those who are not prepared to discount it as liberally as himself.

After Dostoevsky's death, Strakhov wrote to Tolstoi, communicating an incident in Dostoevsky's life which may have been invented by Strakhov to connect Dostoevsky as a man with the form of sexual perversion he dwells on with such imaginative intensity in his account of Svidrigailov's last night and in Stavroguin's Confession. As Strakhov was a close friend of Dostoevsky, he does not rise in the reader's esteem by his readiness, as soon as Dostoevsky was dead, to depreciate him to the other great figure in the Russian literary scene. The less heat shown by Mr. Lloyd at this particular point, the better for Dostoevsky, to whose various manias, gambling, nationalistic, anti-aristocratic and so on, the reader should by now have become resigned. But Mr. Lloyd's method of clearing his unhappy client is first of all to claim that a man who had suffered so much as Dostoevsky ought not to have these charges brought against him—"There have not been lacking eager little souls only too willing to interpret the ulcers of fiction as the ulcers of fact in the life of a man of genius already so cruelly punished"—and then to bring forward as a witness for the defence Madame Kovalesky, a married lady to whom Dostoevsky, while taking tea with her and her young daughters, narrated an episode in an as yet unwritten novel, the rape of a girl of ten. Yet Madame Kovalesky, Mr. Lloyd triumphantly cries, did not identify Dostoevsky with the character guilty of this act. Hardly a point that in all the circumstances Madame

Kovalesky would have cared to make at the time, even if she had had an able-bodied footman within call; and no one except Mr. Lloyd can feel certain that she did not make it later.

In fairness to Mr. Lloyd I must say that I read his book with sustained interest, while closing it with the hope that, in fairness to Dostoevsky, the case for the prosecution would not be long delayed.

## HAMLET BORGIANIZED

SALVADOR DE MADARIAGA, a Spaniard by birth, has written most of his books in English. In addition to being an honorary fellow of Exeter College, an honorary doctor of three continental universities, and an ex-professor of Spanish studies in Oxford, he has held several important appointments on the League of Nations, and has been decorated by countries as far apart as China and Peru, Mexico and Czechoslovakia. With this background of race and experience it is not to be expected that he should write of Hamlet<sup>1</sup> in the spirit of his English academic colleagues, and though it would be misleading to liken him to a rogue elephant in their midst, he may perhaps be likened to a rogue sheep.

His argument, put more concisely and less considerately than he himself puts it, is that as a Spaniard he understands the uninhibited temper of Elizabethan England, whereas the Englishman of to-day, aesthetically blasted by Puritanism, sees Shakespeare through a moral and sentimental fog. To illustrate his meaning he compares Wordsworth, the type and model of our latter-day primness and respectability, with Shakespeare, who, 'we may be sure, lived in holy horror of all teaching'. Free from any prepossession in favour of this or that kind of conduct, Shakespeare created 'heroes' and 'criminals' for the stage with as much serenity as the Spirit creates them for the world, 'for, in fact, neither Shakespeare nor the Spirit creates heroes or criminals; since "nothing is either good or bad but thinking makes it so".'

Where there is no sense of absolute values, the will of the individual becomes the only guide to action. In the twilight of romanticism, towards the close of the nineteenth century, will-worship was the prevailing creed, permeating the writings of men so different from one another as Nietzsche, Ibsen, and Oscar Wilde. Its most brilliant exponent in Shakespearean criticism was the Danish Jew, Professor George Brandes, who, like Nietzsche, though more soberly and with occasional gleams of insight into the nature of imaginative genius, conceived

<sup>1</sup> *On Hamlet*. By Salvador de Madariaga.

that the function of the poet was to glorify self-assertion in all its exemplars, from the sage or artist withdrawing in disgust from the world to the conqueror whose contempt for men expressed itself in the still more admirable form of massacring or enslaving them. Professor Madariaga has had the advantage, denied to Professor Brandes, of living in the age of Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin, yet still preserves the illusion that the mediums of mass envy, rage, and fear, are free and glorious spirits. Perhaps he has been helped to preserve this illusion because, following Brandes and Nietzsche, he has set the golden age of untrammelled impulse, the fairyland of the will, some centuries back, in the time of the Renaissance; and it is under the spell of this strange fancy that he considers *Hamlet*.

An era, he writes, can be both barbarous and super-subtle — 'Cesare Borgia was both, magnificently'. When Hamlet, who has just stabbed Polonius, remarks, 'I'll lug the guts into the neighbour room', he behaves in this inhuman fashion, comments Professor Madariaga, 'out of the very exuberance of his Renaissance-Borgian indifference to any other human being than himself'. Hamlet, as described by Professor Madariaga, is a callous, completely self-centred egotist. This is not the view of the English academic critics, who, as the author shows in a number of illuminating quotations, have transformed Hamlet into a high-minded Victorian gentleman, perplexed by circumstances which run counter to the instincts of a refined temperament and an affectionate disposition. Professor Bradley speaks of the 'peculiar beauty and nobility' of Hamlet's nature. Mr. Harold Child (a dramatic critic with a markedly academic bias) rejoices in Edmund Kean's emphasis on Hamlet's abiding passion for Ophelia; and Professor Dover Wilson, Professor Madariaga's main target, contrasts 'the ranting insincerity of Laertes' with the agony of Hamlet's great and tortured spirit, pleads that Hamlet did not repel Ophelia, but Ophelia Hamlet, and holds that Shakespeare loved Hamlet above all other creatures of his brain.

Professor Madariaga, attending to what Hamlet actually says and does, argues that his delay in killing Claudius springs from his inability to focus his mind on anything that does not directly touch him, for he is prompt enough to take the offensive as soon as he is menaced in his own person, by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, by Laertes, and finally by



Claudius himself. At one point, in his anxiety to borgianize Hamlet completely, the author credits him with 'the solid soul of a strong man of action', but his usual and truer view is that Hamlet is too egotistic for action, for 'man can only act by, so to speak, mating with the outside world'.

No one capable of reading the play with detachment will dispute that Professor Madariaga's description of Hamlet is substantially correct. What such a reader may well question is Professor Madariaga's enthusiasm for the play, which he calls one of the few great masterpieces of the European spirit, and his prostration before 'the powers and graces of the most fascinating character of the European stage'.

*Hamlet* is not a masterpiece, though there is enough genius in it to fill out half a dozen masterpieces. Written in a mood of inflamed egotism by the most gifted of all poets, it appeals irresistibly to the egotism of its readers, who identify themselves with the principal character, transforming him into an idealized version of themselves. Hamlet is every man's self-love with all its dreams realized. He wears all the crowns and carries every cross. Of royal blood, superbly graced in mind and body, adored by a beautiful maiden, humoured by an anxious king and a worried mother, timidly placated by the chief minister, dumbly attended by a strong and faithful friend, lickspittled by any nobleman he encounters, merciless in wit and insight, prompt and deadly in act, he is yet the loneliest of men, a stranger in a strange world, moving among persons (to pluck out the heart of his mystery without further ado) who are less interested really in him than in themselves. 'It is *we* who are Hamlet,' Hazlitt wrote. Hence the overmastering desire of every actor to play Hamlet, and the peculiarly intimate and even caressing tone which permeates all the interpretations of his character. To Goethe, in whom a nostalgia for a more highly coloured existence than he enjoyed as a minister in Weimar was balanced by the insight of a profoundly imaginative spirit, Hamlet is 'a lovely, pure, and most moral nature, without the strength of nerve which forms a hero'. To Coleridge, Hamlet, though brave and careless of danger, is hampered by his dealings with ordinary life by a great, an almost enormous, intellectual activity, and an overbalance of the imaginative power. To the English academic critics whom Professor Madariaga harries (though from time to time interpolating compliments which lack of space

precludes me from quoting) Hamlet is a blend of Goethe's Hamlet and Coleridge's, with various modifications and additions, the desirability of which may have been suggested by Polonius's injunction against borrowing. To Professor Madariaga himself Hamlet is a Renaissance bravo, unfitted for life not by superfluous scruples but by an excess of Borgiaism.

The fact that Professor Madariaga's description of Hamlet would help the police to an arrest much more quickly than Goethe's or Coleridge's does not, however, explain the presence among Shakespeare's plays of a Borgia day-dream. Professor Madariaga feels no need of any explanation. A poet to him is a would-be man of action who finds his highest satisfaction in imagining the deeds of violence he dares not commit. In the concluding paragraph of his book he pictures Shakespeare as 'distant and aloof, unable to pour himself out into life, a keen light, a cold flame, no smoke; and down there at the very root of his being, the void, the disappointment, and the frustration of a life lived only in the reflected image of a mirror . . . ' To the academic mind literature is a substitute for life, not a means of realizing it; and hence the bitterness with which the academic critic repels the view that a man's writings are not an escape into fairyland but a map of his own spiritual development. In the ten to twelve years before he wrote *Hamlet* Shakespeare had made himself the best-known playwright of the day, and had raised the social status of actors to a point at which it was possible to apply successfully for a coat-of-arms; and he had pursued women as feverishly as fame and social position, if more intermittently. The *Sonnets* are a direct revelation of the checks, reverses, and humiliations he suffered in those years. *Hamlet* is an indirect revelation, its princely hero avenging on both sexes all the pains the obscure actor and too impulsive lover had endured without satisfactory reprisal. The murderer Claudius, as Professor Madariaga points out, is tormented by a Christian conscience; but when Hamlet reproaches himself it is only because he has not yet killed his uncle. Hamlet, created as balm for Shakespeare's wounded self-love, could not express the conflict in the depth of Shakespeare's soul. It is left to Claudius to express that—

O limèd soul, that, struggling to be free,  
Art more engaged.

Professor Madariaga has drawn a comparison, elaborate rather than illuminating, between *Don Quixote* and *Hamlet*. The real distinction between them is that *Hamlet* is egotism as it appears to itself, and *Don Quixote* is egotism as it appears to the detached observer, the first providing inexhaustible matter for earnest and loving cogitation, the second delighting everyone with its side-splitting antics. Richer, more complex, and less coherent than Cervantes, Shakespeare never succeeded in seeing himself so clearly; but in *Lear* his vision pierced through to a world veiled from Cervantes—

Thou art a soul in bliss, but I am bound  
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears  
Do scald like molten lead—

and he sunk an even deeper shaft into human egotism than the author of *Don Quixote* when he depicted in *Macbeth* the pilgrimage of a Borgian from its auspicious outset to its unexuberant end.

## BIOGRAPHY AND CRITICISM

NO reasonable writer will complain at being borrowed from, provided no acknowledgment is made. But to be borrowed from and disparaged simultaneously is excessive; and this has happened to me a good many times in late years, especially in connexion with what I have written about Dickens and D. H. Lawrence. As a rule a borrower's ill will on these occasions derives from nothing more complex than a desire, probably unconscious, to minimize his feeling of obligation; but it may be strengthened by a natural antipathy to the outlook and temperament of the person he has laid under contribution, and in these circumstances his disparagement, though ungracious, is sufficiently sincere.

Some years ago the American critic Mr. Edmund Wilson published a volume of essays called *The Wound and the Bow*. The book bristled with ideas which, though momentarily stimulating, had the peculiar emptiness of ideas evolving out of one another instead of growing out of experience. There seemed to be little connexion between Mr. Wilson's brilliant mental apparatus and the rest of Mr. Wilson. This state of dissociation being common at present, the book had a great success, both in the States and here, and was especially appreciated by the many persons nowadays addicted to the game of Hunt the Symbol. In his essay on Dickens Mr. Wilson wrote: 'The people who like to talk about the symbols of Kafka and Mann and Joyce, have been discouraged from looking for anything of the kind in Dickens,' a preposterous state of things which Mr. Wilson put right by demonstrating that Dickens is crammed with symbols, *Bleak House* being particularly rich in them, from the fog which symbolizes Chancery to old Krook's cat which watches the caged birds in Miss Flite's lodging as the Chancery lawyers watched their unlucky clients. Mr. Wilson might have gone on to point out that the romances of Bulwer Lytton and Rider Haggard are also stacked with symbols, and that in popular thrillers it is difficult to move a step without barking a shin against a symbol, and so at last might have reached a conclusion which, had he reached

it earlier, would have saved him a great deal of trouble—namely, that the freer and more harmonized a writer's imagination the less obtrusive will be the symbolic element in his work. In great art the image merges into what it represents, time into eternity. In bad art time is disjoined from eternity, and homeless symbols wander in a waste land. The second part of *Faust*, for example, is full of personifications walking about on two legs. What they signify is as obvious as it is unilluminating, but what does Gretchen in the first part signify? She is a whole human being, her roots are in eternity, and what she signifies is included in what she is, and what she is it is easier to apprehend than to define.

A writer is not a hat-rack hung with symbols. He is a living entity whom a critic must try to apprehend as a whole before he begins to interpret him in detail. Here and there in *The Wound and the Bow* Mr. Wilson, feeling this necessity, suspended his symbol-chasing to consider his subjects as human beings. On one of these occasions he drew attention to the fact that the name of Ellen Lawless Ternan, Dickens's mistress, is echoed in the heroines of his last three novels, Estella, Bella Wilfer, and Helena Landless. This quite interesting point had previously been made by me in my book on Dickens, his acquaintance with which Mr. Wilson did not trouble to conceal, denouncing it in the forefront of his essay as Bloomsbury trying to be clever at the expense of the man whom Taine called 'the master of all hearts'.

I do not doubt that Mr. Wilson sincerely disapproved my attempt to form a coherent and comprehensive conception of the extraordinary man whose mastery of all hearts or (to put it another way) power of magnetizing the masses may be compared even with Hitler's. It was clearly a more endearing and less exhausting enterprise to rummage about in the novels, pull out old Krook's cat or the prison in *Little Dorrit* or the dust-heap in *Our Mutual Friend*, and turn these objects over to exhibit their symbolical underside. But if criticism is to be more than an academic diversion, a critic should not be content to play about inside a man's work as though it were a glass bowl suspended in a vacuum. A man's work expresses his character, his character explains his work, and each should be used to illuminate the other. In practical matters, where life or property or reputation is at stake, this interrelation is always taken into account. An employer requires to see a

man before he engages him, though he may be completely satisfied about his competence. A general informs himself about the character of his opponent as well as about his movements. A politician studies his rivals even more closely than their election addresses. Had the master of all hearts asked Taine to arrange for the publication of his novels in France, Pecksniff would have been present to Taine's consciousness at least as vividly as Pickwick until the negotiations were completed. It is only when nothing but intellectual and spiritual integrity are at stake that false sentiment and inexpensive magnanimity are given a free rein, and hagiography substituted for the light and shade of a truthful portrait. Without a total impression of a man in the mind's eye, one cannot assess the value and significance of his separate words and actions. 'I desire nothing but friendship with America', for example, has a different value according as it is spoken by Stalin or by Winston Churchill. There is indeed a level on which the biographical test no longer operates. Many of Christ's words, and certain passages in the greatest poets, rise above their mortal context into a timeless world. But even in the Gospels there are sayings and actions which seem to be conditioned by human limitations; and there is much in Beethoven, more in Shakespeare, and still more in Wordsworth which requires to be elucidated from our knowledge of the men themselves.

I have just been reading *The Cult of the Superman*,<sup>1</sup> a volume of essays by Mr. Eric Bentley, an American critic. Mr. Bentley's theme is modern will-worship or, in his own phrase, Heroic Vitalism, and he approaches it through its chief exponents—Carlyle, Nietzsche, Wagner, Shaw, and D. H. Lawrence. In his better moments Mr. Bentley is witty and perceptive, and quite aware how essential it is to treat the ideas of his Vitalists in the contexts of their lives and characters. His biographical framework for Carlyle is particularly good, as may be inferred from such remarks as: 'His rise to fame was gradual but well-planned and steady'; 'He was the tiger-cub of the rich. He had to be violent enough to amuse them without endangering his own position.' But the fear that if he glitters it will be presumed that he cannot be gold

<sup>1</sup> *The Cult of the Superman* A study of the Idea of Heroism in Carlyle and Nietzsche, with notes on other hero-worshippers of modern times By Eric Bentley.

seems always hovering over Mr. Bentley. It is (one hears him reflecting) only a step from being intelligible to being interesting. From being interesting a man slips into being amusing, and before he knows what's happening, there he is at the bottom of the slope, in a huddle of post-Stracheyan debunkers, talking about human beings. Under the pressure of these misgivings and, I suspect, with one eye on Mr. Edmund Wilson, whom he admires, he denounces 'the present obsession with biography', and then, a little later, his good sense stirring again, puts out a faint demurrer: 'For all that we must not ignore the fact that biography is just as essential a part of cultural history as economics or philosophy.' In other words, though the economic and ideological tail wags the dog on most days, it must not be overlooked that there are days when the dog wags the economic and ideological tail.

In his bibliography Mr. Bentley refers to my book on D. H. Lawrence as 'The best hostile study of Lawrence. Funny.' So far as my book is amusing it is so merely because of the tragi-comedy inherent in every life in which ideas and practice are dissociated. There is nothing amusing in my first chapter, which Mr. Bentley seems to have read with less attention than the later ones, for in his sketch of Lawrence's life he writes of him as 'the son of a good-for-nothing miner and an earnest Congregationalist mother'. Lawrence's father loved his wife and children; Lawrence's mother was a savage egotist who despised her ineffectual, soft-hearted husband and focused her thwarted ambitions and desires on her youngest son. The conflict between his parents was never resolved in Lawrence. That was his tragedy, and the reason why his genius remained unfruitful. His disciples were attracted to him by the ideas he emitted like a ceaseless stream of sparks. They did not care or even perceive that the dog was unable to wag his tail, but sat around waiting for the coruscating tail to wag the dog. That was the comedy in his life. In unfolding this comedy I was inspired not by hostility to Lawrence, whose predicament I took much more trouble than any of his disciples to understand, but by a desire to illustrate the truth, particularly neglected to-day, that ideas get substance and value not by being discussed but by being lived.

## THE HEROIC VITALISTS

THE sub-title of Mr. Eric Bentley's *Cult of the Superman* is 'A Study of the Idea of Heroism in Carlyle and Nietzsche, with notes on other hero-worshippers of modern times'. Nietzsche has a curiously hypnotic effect on Mr. Bentley, but with Carlyle, perhaps because he is farther off and can therefore be seen more clearly, Mr. Bentley is in much greater command of himself, and has managed, with remarkable skill and patience, to bring some kind of order into a chaos of ideas which their possessor was neither able nor willing to clarify either to others or to himself.

Carlyle did not believe in an eternal world. His language was transcendental, partly because he could not bring himself to break openly with the religion of his parents and partly because he was repelled by the arid scepticism of the eighteenth century. But there was no reality for him beyond time, beyond the flow of change and becoming; he held with Schiller that there is no absolute truth, and so was compelled in due course to accept worldly success as the sole test of achievement and proof of virtue. Prussia had beaten France in 1870, and therefore to Carlyle Prussia for the time being embodied truth, or, as he put it: 'Germany is in a state of theological transition. Dogma is yielding to fact. The Christian Church is changing; but the grand truths of Christianity are unalterable. In the hands of Bismarck, the chiefest statesman of the age, Germany's progress is as certain as the rising of to-morrow's sun. Nothing is to be feared.' Life for Carlyle, by the time he wrote this passage, was a game, the mass of mankind the pieces, and the players such men as Bismarck and Frederick the Great. This was the only reality he was able to recognize in his later years; but conceit, mixed with the vestiges of a purer feeling, forced him to deify Frederick and Bismarck so as to preserve the illusion that his Everlasting Yea, far from wholly sincere even in his youth, still affirmed the divinity of man.

Nietzsche began where Carlyle ended. The faces of the two men express the difference between them: Carlyle's stubborn, hostile mouth and thrust-out jaw is in some degree



redeemed by the latent regret and compassion in his eyes; Nietzsche's set jaw, foaming moustache, fixed glare, and hair swept up from the forehead in a challenging wave is a mask fashioned to impose upon others the terrors of his own soul. Carlyle could get outside himself. In his youth he had felt affection for friends and something approaching love for women; his insight into other human beings, though intermittent and erratic, was sometimes extraordinarily penetrating; and he was, in flashes, both a poet and a humorist. Nietzsche, though the pressure which finally drove him mad was sometimes relaxed in solitary ecstasies dissolving into tears, never escaped from himself. People were not human beings to him, they were walking ideas, pieces in a symbolic jigsaw puzzle which he could never put together because the pieces were always changing their shapes; Wagner, the creator of a new and higher man, turning into a noisy charlatan, Lou Salomé, twin soul and feminine counterpart, into a sophisticated coquette, and Heinrich von Stein into the Beloved Disciple of Judas-Wagner instead of Nietzsche-Christ.

Nietzsche's belief, far more vehement and conscious than Carlyle's, that life is endless change, grew inevitably out of his frustration. He was a starving man who could imagine nothing but food, and food again; and since such a man wants a meal to devour, not a sunset to look at, so the famished Nietzsche denounced the harmony beyond desire, the state of being which the mystics, religious and poetic, have divined as the goal of becoming. Hence his philosophy of the Will to Power, based, as Mr. Bentley puts it, on 'the ceaseless process of Becoming which, though it is ever in conflict, has no stopping points and no final goal'. The intense passion with which Nietzsche proclaimed his philosophy has obscured the fact that it is the dream of a sick professor, raging triumphantly through a world amazed and abashed by the tiger they had taken for a sheepdog. Himself the prey of ideas, he imagined glorious beings guided entirely by their instincts: Napoleon ('brilliant, cruel, unscrupulous, successful, contemptuous of his age, and aloof from his peers'); Caesar Borgia, who, had he been elected Pope, would have transformed the destiny of Europe; the pre-Socratic Greeks, athletic aesthetes, cruel and beautiful. To find a place for himself in his dream, to align himself with Napoleon, Caesar Borgia and the pre-Socratic Greeks, or even to transcend them, he became

the creator of an improved version of his heroes, the superman, 'the hero of the future . . . a man of tragic awareness . . . the light of Grecian joyousness on his brow'. Against the superman and his forerunners Nietzsche placed the slave-minds, pre-eminent among them Paul, a cunning degenerate who, inspired by bottomless envy of pagan grace and power, invented a life beyond the grave reserved for the meek, the humble, and the timid, an attractive prospect which united the masses of the Roman Empire against their masters and flooded Europe with the poison of Christianity.

These fantasies were the natural result of an intense longing for love perverted by spiritual malformation into an intense longing for power. Those who cannot get into touch with their fellow-creatures through sympathy must establish contact by force, in theory as with Nietzsche, in practice as with Napoleon or Hitler; and since contacts made by force are unsatisfying, power cannot but be insatiable, in ceaseless motion, and without a final goal.

The connecting-link between Mr. Bentley's subjects, the common element in their natures, is their preoccupation with power, and corresponding hostility to the idea of harmony and completion. Carlyle, the earliest and greatest of the group, was the least hostile. 'We must renounce ideals,' he wrote in *Frederick the Great*. 'We must sadly take up with the mournfullest barren realities.' Nietzsche, the loneliest and least successful of the group, was the most denunciatory of other than temporal values. D. H. Lawrence circled the world with a portable totalitarian outfit into which he was always trying to cram his male and female disciples, or, as Mr. Bentley more tenderly puts it: 'Lawrence came to regard the need which he had felt for absolute friendship with his peers to be misguided. It was a legacy of the era of universal benevolence, the "man of feeling", and the myth of perfectibility. The place of friendship will be taken by lordship.' Stefan George, who built up a superman cult round a boy he met in the streets of Munich, and who mistrusted biography, disapproving attempts to find the man behind his work, expressed his general impatience of everyone except himself in one of those cryptic banalities of which until recent times Germans alone possessed the secret: 'He who never selected on his brother's body the spot for a dagger thrust, how easy is his life!' Bernard Shaw, whom Mr. Bentley considers together with Wagner, defended

Wagner, unnecessarily, from the suspicion that he had extricated himself from the ceaseless flux so abundantly imaged in his music. 'The only faith', Shaw wrote, 'which any reasonable disciple can gain from *The Ring* is not in love but in life itself as a tireless power which is continually driving onward and upward.'

Before the Battle of the Nile, one of Nelson's captains urged that it would be dangerous to sail into the bay because of the concealed rocks in it. 'Go in and find one,' Nelson replied. 'Then we'll know where one rock is, anyway.' Mr. Bentley's book is dotted with ships piled upon rocks, but Mr. Bentley cannot decide whether the right course is to steer past these ships or to pile up beside them. He follows his Heroic Vitalists as Sancho Panza followed Don Quixote, grumbling, shrewdly critical, perpetually dissatisfied, yet still expectant, still against his better judgment hopeful. Mr. Bentley is a Pragmatist, a disciple of William James, who advocated judging by results, a method also recommended by Jesus: 'By their fruits ye shall know them. . . . Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles?' The fruits of the philosophy of power have been gathered in this generation. Mr. Bentley's comment is: 'Much as they worshipped heroes, preached power, turned diabolist, the Heroic Vitalists did not want this. . . . Fascism is the apotheosis of all that the Heroic Vitalists loathed.' Satan did not want Hell, and in loathing Fascism the Heroic Vitalists would have loathed only the externalization of their own corruption:

'Me miserable! which way shall I fly  
Infinite wrath, and infinite despair?'

## THE COMFORTS OF RICHARD WAGNER

THE third volume of Mr. Ernest Newman's monumental *Life of Wagner* has now been published, and there is one more volume to come. As Wagner, on whom he began to write towards the close of the nineteenth century, has taken so much of Mr. Newman's thought and energy, it is natural that he should regard him as his own property, much as Dr. Johnson regarded Garrick, and resent hostile criticism of him by anyone except himself. In 1941 Mr. Newman wrote: 'It is not surprising that Wagner has been pressed so vigorously into the service of Nazi ideology. . . . He was convinced that the Germans were the greatest race the world has ever seen, with a heroic mission to inoculate the rest of the world with its own culture.' In the April of this year, 1945, he wrote: 'It is often said by the malignant and the ill-informed that, were Wagner living to-day, he would be a Nazi. That is quite untrue.' His attention having been called by two readers of the *Sunday Times* to the contradiction between these two statements, Mr. Newman denied the contradiction, on the ground that Wagner's anti-Semitism and belief in the doctrine of the *Herrenvolk* would never have led him to countenance ill-treatment of the Jews or foreign aggression. 'It is', he sums up, 'only with Wagner the artist, not Wagner the muddled political phantast, that the civilized world has any concern to-day.'

Wagner the artist and Wagner the political phantast were not separate persons. A man's artistic faculty is merely the means by which he communicates his vision of life, and, however brilliant, however complex, cannot purify a corrupted vision or deepen a shallow one; for how a man sees life is determined by how he lives it. How, then, did Wagner live his life between his forty-seventh and fifty-fourth years, the period covered by Mr. Newman in the five hundred pages of this third volume? In Wagner's favour it may be said that Mr. Newman, who never withholds facts, though he sometimes interprets them rather surprisingly, has no wars or pogroms to score up to Wagner's account. On the other hand, there is

nothing at all in this book to suggest that, if the way to the production of his operas had lain through wars and pogroms, Wagner would have hesitated to lead a pogrom or to direct a war. The rest of the world existed for him exclusively in relation to himself. Whatever his desires, great or small, he expected them to be gratified, and felt betrayed if they weren't. Here is a minor example: Peter Cornelius, a musician who had been careless enough to disclose his admiration of Wagner, was trying to complete an opera in Vienna. Wagner, whom the adoration of the youthful King Ludwig was beginning to bore, summoned Cornelius to Munich. 'I am frightfully lonely,' he had just written to a friend: 'it is only on the highest mountain peaks, as it were, that I can maintain myself with this young king.' Cornelius having declined to supply a valley in which Wagner could relax himself, Wagner sent him the following ultimatum: 'Either you accept my invitation immediately and settle down for the rest of your days to some sort of domestic lifebond with me—or you reject my proposal with scorn, and so expressly disclaim the wish to unite yourself with me. In the latter case I, for my part, renounce you wholly and absolutely. . . .' Cornelius, the most sensible of Wagner's friends, ignored this ultimatum, remaining in Vienna until it suited him to move to Munich. The situation of Hans von Bülow, another of Wagner's admirers, was much less satisfactory from the strategical standpoint, for he possessed a wife whom Wagner wanted to marry. There were a good many obstacles in the way, including Wagner's wife, and the intricate story of how Cosima von Bülow became Cosima Wagner is unravelled with great skill by Mr. Newman, who argues convincingly against what he calls 'the sacrosanct biographical legend that Wagner and Cosima "deceived" Bülow for some two years from July 1864'. In the first week of this July Cosima and Wagner had, as Mr. Newman puts it, 'found each other, never to be separated in heart and soul again'. Bülow was on the verge of a nervous breakdown before this happy event and two months after it was 'lying desperately ill—temporarily paralysed in both legs and one arm'. So Mr. Newman is scarcely to be accused of recklessness when he writes: 'The supposition cannot be ruled out that his breakdown may have been the result, in part, of a frank revelation by Wagner and Cosima of the new domestic situation that had suddenly arisen.' It clearly suited Wagner's

convenience as much to be frank with Bulow about his future requirements where Cosima was concerned as it suited Hitler's to be frank with Hacha and Schuschnigg about the new domestic situations that had suddenly arisen in their respective countries. Had Bulow not been apprised of the New Order which was coming into being, there would have been no point in Wagner indicating his place in this order, in the elevated but sufficiently explicit terms of a letter he wrote to Bulow during his convalescence: 'Her (Cosima's) due is freedom in the noblest sense of the word. She is childlike and profound—the law of her being will always lead her to the highest only. . . . She belongs to a peculiar world order which we must learn to grasp through her. You will have, in the future, more propitious leisure and freedom of your own to consider this, and to find your noble place by her side. And that too is a comfort to me.'

Only one sacrifice, Bulow wrote some years later, had not been asked of him—his life; and even from that (he added) he would perhaps not have recoiled had he observed in Wagner, 'as sublime in his works as he is incomparably abject in his actions, the smallest hint of an approach towards loyalty, the most fugitive suggestion of a sense of honesty'.

The other main episode in these years was Wagner's looting of the young King Ludwig. In their financial aspect the lives of most writers, painters and musicians suggest a man leaping from ice floe to ice floe across a wide and rapid river. A strenuous, not a dignified, spectacle. In a situation which does not display even Rembrandt and Beethoven to advantage, it would be fantastic to demand much from Wagner, whose guiding principle was always that the rest of Europe might starve, but not Wagner. Yet even from Wagner one might have expected some slight effort to temper the wind to the young lamb who had run up so guilelessly and lovingly to the shearer's hand. At the age of fifty-one, in whatever direction he looked, Wagner could descry nothing but devastated friends. One evening his Stuttgart landlord informed him that a gentleman from Munich wished to see him on urgent business. This gave Wagner a bad night. The gentleman, however, was not a former friend but an envoy from a future one, Ludwig, who had just succeeded to the crown of Bavaria. For some years (he was now eighteen) Ludwig had resolved as

soon as he was king to come to the rescue of Wagner, whose world of knights and pilgrims and pinnaced palaces and lakes and dreaming swans marvellously embodied his expectation of the reality he would enjoy when he ascended the throne. 'I will do everything in my power', Ludwig wrote to Wagner after their first meeting, 'to make up to you for what you have suffered in the past. The mean cares of everyday life I will banish from you for ever; I will procure for you the peace you have longed for in order that you may be free to spread the mighty wings of your genius in the pure ether of rapturous art.'

What during the next two years Ludwig went through in one way, what Wagner in another, is fully and clearly set forth by Mr. Newman. Supplied with one of the largest houses in Munich, Wagner furnished and decorated it to the farthest limit of his flamboyant taste; nor were the adornment and comfort of his own person looked to on a less lavish scale, his dress and setting varying with his humour at the moment. 'That day', a visitor records, 'he was in a violet mood. The window was covered with a heavy curtain of violet velvet; he was sitting in a violet velvet robe in a violet velvet arm-chair; on his head was a violet velvet cap, which he raised ever so slightly as he rose on my entry.' In addition to being supported in this style, Wagner wanted a new music school, to be directed by himself, and a new theatre, to be devoted solely to the performance of his own works. The situation of the king, with Wagner on one side, and on the other his indignant ministers against a background of scurrilous journalists and outraged citizens, does not need to be elaborated. Sometimes he would try, very gingerly, to put the brake on, with what effect the following interchange will show. Wagner in a letter to Ludwig: 'Shall I go? Shall I stay? Your will is mine. If I go it will be to some distant land. . . . One word, and joyfully I accept my fate. But the decision must be made, and to-day.' Ludwig's reply: 'Dear friend,—Remain here, remain here; everything will be as glorious as before. My work presses. Till death—Yours, Ludwig.'

When at last Wagner decided that it was time to leave Munich, which now seemed to him to be poisoned by Jews and Jesuits and really not a German town at all, he settled by the lake of Lucerne, in a house which Ludwig bought for him and in which he lived for the next six years, with Cosima,

at the king's expense—and that too, beyond doubt, was a comfort to him.

As long ago as 1857 Amiel, the Genevese thinker whose deep and subtle insight into the tendencies of the nineteenth century is only now beginning to be recognized, wrote in his journal the following criticism of Wagner's *Tannhäuser*: 'It is music depersonalized—neo-Hegelian music—music multiple instead of individual. If this is so, it is indeed the music of the future, the music of the Socialist democracy. . . . The overture pleased me even less than at the first hearing: it is like Nature before man appeared. Everything in it is enormous, savage, elementary, like the murmur of forests and the roar of animals. It is forbidding and obscure, because Man—that is to say, mind, the key of the enigma, personality, the spectator—is wanting to it. . . . This music has its root and its fulcrum in the tendencies of the epoch—materialism and socialism—each of them ignoring the true value of the human personality, and drowning it in the totality of Nature or of Society.'



## WHAT ARE POLITICS?

TIMES have changed since I edited the literary supplement of the *English Review* in 1935. Ten years ago people assumed that a literary supplement was a literary supplement—that is, a collection of reviews, written by individuals each with his own standpoint. Nowadays, if I may generalize from my experience since the spring of this year, a large number of persons approach a literary supplement with the assumption that it is a co-ordinated series of reviews planned to reinforce such political opinions as are expressed in the main body of the paper. On this kind of reader the mere contents of a literary supplement produce no impression at all, to judge from an article by George Orwell which I have just read in *Polemic*, a magazine whose policy, according to an editorial introduction, 'is prejudiced in the direction of encouraging discussions about those trends in contemporary thought which we think are most significant'.

Orwell's article is entitled 'Notes on Nationalism', and is concerned with nationalism 'as it occurs among the English intelligentsia'.

By nationalism, Orwell explains, he means, first of all, 'the habit of assuming that human beings can be classified like insects and that whole blocks of millions or tens of millions of people can be confidently labelled "good" or "bad" '; and, secondly, 'the habit of identifying oneself with a single nation or other unit, placing it beyond good or evil, and recognizing no other duty than that of advancing its interests'. Among the eleven varieties of nationalism noted by Orwell in the English intelligentsia of to-day there is one which he calls Neo-Toryism. The unit with which the Neo-Tory identifies himself, placing it beyond good and evil, is Britain; and the two chief blocks of alien millions whom he confidently labels 'bad' are Russia and America. His organs of opinion are the literature of the Tory Reform Committee, the *New English Review* and the *Nineteenth Century and After*; typical Neo-Tories are Lord Elton, A. P. Herbert, G. M. Young, and Professor Pickthorn; and among the writers who

illustrate the tendency of Neo-Toryism or are psychologically affiliated to it are F. A. Voigt, Malcolm Muggeridge, Evelyn Waugh, Hugh Kingsmill, T. S. Eliot, and Wyndham Lewis.

*Animal Farm*, a fable of the Russian Revolution, revealed the poetry, humour and tenderness in Orwell; but it seems to be only when he thinks of men as animals that he can see them as human beings and feel at one with them. In his direct relations with them he is always the party man, disgusted with all existing parties by repeated disillusionments, but still involved in the collective mania of the age, and determined to implicate everyone else in his own predicament. I understand this desire of his, but I see no reason why I should indulge it, though it is certainly harder to reply to a nonsensical charge than to one with some substance in it. Othello, firm and lucid in his statements after marrying and after murdering Desdemona, might have fumbled his opening sentences had an albino charged him with being an albino.

As I have never belonged to any party, I have no authority to speak for others, and shall therefore confine my remarks on Orwell's account of Neo-Toryism to its relevance to myself as a writer and as the editor of this supplement. The first thing which struck me about his list of Neo-Tories was the very faint connexion existing between myself and eight of the other nine. Malcolm Muggeridge and I are old friends, but I doubt if even Orwell could see in Muggeridge and myself the cell of a reactionary underground movement. Lord Elton I do not know; A. P. Herbert, except for a distant glimpse at the Savage, I have not seen since we were at Blandford twenty-nine years ago; from G. M. Young I have had two letters on non-political matters; I am indebted to Orwell for my introduction to the name of Professor Pickthorn; F. A. Voigt once wrote asking me to contribute a literary article to the *Nineteenth Century*, I replied that I should be delighted to, and, after two years of silence at the other end, wrote again in the same sense and with the same result; Evelyn Waugh I last saw when he was living in Golders Green; T. S. Eliot I have met three times, Wyndham Lewis once.

These social jottings define the position I occupy in the Neo-Tory conspiracy to aggrandize Britain at the expense of Russia and America; though it is, of course, open to Orwell to reply that I am a pawn in the hands of the key-men, and

that, when the hour is ripe, I shall receive my instructions from Professor Pickthorn.

I now come to Orwell's suggestion that, as a Neo-Tory, I am one of those who divide mankind into blocks of millions or tens of millions of people, label some blocks 'good' and others 'bad', and recognize no other duty than that of advancing the interests of the unit with which they have identified themselves.

In the introduction to *The Poisoned Crown*, which appeared in the spring of 1944 and which Orwell reviewed in the *Observer*, I wrote: 'Many remedies for a shattered world are now being offered to mankind, but they are all collective remedies, and collective remedies do not heal the ills produced by collective action. . . . What is divine in man is elusive and impalpable, and he is easily tempted to embody it in a concrete form—a church, a country, a social system, a leader—so that he may realize it with less effort and serve it with more profit. Yet, as even Lincoln proved, the attempt to externalize the kingdom of heaven in a temporal shape must end in disaster. It cannot be created by charters or constitutions nor established by arms. Those who set out for it alone will reach it together, and those who seek it in company will perish by themselves.'

Twenty years before *The Poisoned Crown* I expressed a similar thought in *The Dawn's Delay*, through a character who defines history as the record of the convulsions caused by the grown man's efforts to find in company with others what he has failed to find alone as child and boy and youth. From the war of 1914 and the opening years of the Russian Revolution I had learnt what the last fifteen years have illustrated on a still larger scale, that revolutions and wars are always in their essence, whatever their secondary causes, an attempt to carry Eden by weight of numbers, and effect by the pooling of millions of egotisms what can be effected only by the single individual through the transformation of his own nature; a transformation which I do not believe can be completed in this life, for it seems to me self-evident that even the purest and highest souls cannot achieve perfection within the limitations of time. If, then, even Jesus and Buddha did not realize heaven in this life, if to Beethoven and Wordsworth it was visible only in moments and expressible only in snatches, if all the active goodness of Johnson could not dissipate the melancholia which veiled it from his sight, what meaning is to be attached

to the large offers of secular paradises made to mankind by political leaders from Moses to Lenin and Hitler, from Mohammed to Cecil Rhodes and the author of the Four Freedoms and the last Minister who has spoken of 'winning the peace' as though it were an analogous operation to winning a war? What, in short, are politics, and why too often do they cause men to gibber? In theory they are the method by which the administration of the community is directed and supervised; and here and there, for example in Switzerland, whose size and position make it unsuitable for the purposes of a Napoleon, politics do really confine themselves within these salutary limits. Hence the obscurity in which Swiss politicians pass their lives, and the contempt for Switzerland felt by Lenin and Trotsky and Mussolini and the other revolutionaries who used that stable republic as a base from which to launch an ordered life upon their fellow-countrymen. In less stable countries politics are proportionately less rational, and in extreme cases (the Puritan Revolution, the Napoleonic Empire, the totalitarian states of to-day) all the hopes and dreams of men are absorbed into politics, which become for the few the technique of self-aggrandisement, for the many the key to paradise, and to all a collective hallucination which at last collapses in despair.

Such is my view of what Orwell calls nationalism; and he will find nothing inconsistent with it in any of my books or in my contributions to this paper. Nevertheless, I do not wish to pretend that I am editing a literary supplement in a Tory review by pure chance, or that my sympathies are equally divided between the Right and the Left. On the Right there is room for those who believe that the individual is the only absolute unit, and that all larger units are temporal and transient groupings; and a Tory paper could include without incongruity a literary supplement which, though it might not mean much to Disraeli or even to Burke, would be approved by Johnson, who was sentimental neither about the future nor the past, who lived, far more consistently than Milton, as ever in his great Taskmaster's eye, and who did not shift the responsibility for man's fate on to the institutions created by men.

How small, of all that human hearts endure,  
That part which laws or kings can cause or cure.

## NAPOLEON

MISS DORMER CRESTON's study of Napoleon<sup>1</sup> has certain faults. It is too long; the grafting of Napoleon's son on to the narrative disturbs its symmetry; and Miss Creston's general conclusions, inspired by Lord Rosebery and other adulators of Napoleon, do not spring naturally out of the particular details she has assembled. But these defects are redeemed by the author's feminine sense of the human being behind the stage figure which is all that most of Napoleon's male eulogists or denouncers have been able to see.

'The ways of the men among whom I live, and shall probably always live, are as different from mine as moonlight from sunlight,' Napoleon wrote in his late teens. Like Byron, Dickens, Hitler, and all other idols of the public, he never outgrew the adolescent illusion that he was different in kind from the rest of the world, an illusion which in their hearts most men indulge—hence their idolatry, in essence self-idolatry, of anyone resourceful and tenacious enough to impose his opinion of his own singularity on others. There was nothing strange or profound in Napoleon's desires and ambitions, except their intensity, which isolated him from his companions in his early years, giving him an air of mystery that seems still to envelop him for many people. In her first and perhaps most interesting chapter Miss Creston shows how the poverty of his boyhood and youth, and the indignity of being a Corsican among Frenchmen, lacerated his vanity and determined all his future relations with men and women. But there were gleams of affection and poetic feeling in him which it took some years to extinguish altogether; and although his youthful awkwardness in society sprang chiefly from self-consciousness, there was something of unworldliness in it, for at this time he still loved solitude as an escape from himself, not as an opportunity for thinking out fresh political moves. If one reduces hours to minutes and substitutes 8 p.m. for midnight, it was probably as true of him as

<sup>1</sup> *In Search of Two Characters: Some Intimate Aspects of Napoleon and his Son.* By Dormer Creston.

of the hero in his romance *Clisson et Eugénie* that he would 'spend entire hours meditating in the depths of a wood, and in the evenings he would remain there till midnight, lost in reveries by the light of the silver star of love'.

It was not until the Egyptian campaign, during which he was finally convinced of Josephine's infidelity, that he resolved, as he said himself, to become a complete egotist. In her account of his friendship with the Permons, of whom he saw a great deal before he met Josephine, Miss Creston brings out the capacity for affection which at that time he still possessed. On the day after he had saved the Convention from the Paris mob, he went round in great exultation to the Permons, where he learnt that Monsieur Permon had been wounded in the street fighting, and was dying. 'His gay and open expression changed at once,' the daughter narrates. '... He behaved wonderfully to my mother during these moments of grief. He was himself in a position that must have made all other interests seem unimportant. Well, all I can say is, he behaved like a son, a brother.'

After Egypt his nature revealed itself, now that he was able to satisfy its propensities, as inspired solely by the ideas of happiness and glory current among the mass of mankind. 'The antennae of his mind', Miss Creston remarks in one of the soaring moments into which she sometimes lapses, 'touched the impalpable.' That may be so, but the evidence she has collected shows the immense and always increasing fascination which the palpable in its crudest forms held for him as his life advanced. Wherever he was, he had to make himself felt, even physically. Tears would be seen in the eyes of his toughest generals, Miss Creston says, as Napoleon tugged at their ears or pulled at their noses; and the same treatment was extended to the ladies of the Court and even to children, one of the few occasions on which Napoleon took an active, as distinct from a supervisory, part in one of his battles being when he fell upon a three-year-old nephew, who had resented having his ears pulled, and dealt him a blow that sent him reeling across the room. Nothing short of focusing everyone's attention on himself could compensate him for the obscurity and humiliation of his early years. 'We must give up even the smallest of our old ways of living,' wrote Clari de Remusat, 'so as to have only one thought, that of his interest and his wishes.'

That Hitler was, as Miss Creston claims, 'a man far more

evil than his Corsican forerunner' need not be disputed. But there is nothing to choose between the two when one compares the fatuity almost amounting to imbecility induced in both by their rise to absolute power. After his first king, Carol of Roumania, visited him, Hitler was quite ecstatic; not because the visit had been satisfactory, but because the visitor had been a king—'Heute war ein Koniglein bei mir!' Napoleon, when Marie Louise bore him a son, was overpowered by the thought that his child had royal blood, and one day, when Talma the actor was with him, had the baby brought in, and began to slap him, exclaiming: 'Talma, tell me what I am doing at this moment!' Talma looked puzzled. 'You don't realize what I'm doing. . . . I'm beating a king!'

After some hundreds of pages devoted to showing the triviality, callousness and vulgarity of Napoleon, Miss Creston loses her nerve: 'He had a perspicacious stare into the very centre of any matter. His originality drilled through every convention. One thing he never was and never could be: a gentleman. But in a man of such multiple brilliance, whose radius of being was so extended, such a consideration may be said to be beside the mark. . . .' If it is beside the mark, why write a book to demonstrate it? If it is not beside the mark, why discredit the standard used to judge Napoleon by implying that any fool can be a gentleman, but that to be a cad of Napoleon's dimensions is a proof of singular genius? Genius, it is true, does not take kindly to the self-command and self-effacement which are the characteristics of a gentleman, but it respects these virtues as the cement of civilized life. Napoleon despised them, and all his admirers and imitators, from the millionaires of the nineteenth century to the dictators of the twentieth, have despised them too, with results visible to everyone to-day.

According to Lord Rosebery, whom Miss Creston quotes, Napoleon 'enlarged indefinitely the limits of human conception and human possibility'; and the historian H. A. L. Fisher credited Napoleon with the greatest intellect ever possessed by a human being, while regretting that he applied it to an aim so essentially vulgar as the domination of the world by force—a curious theory of intellectual greatness, though a very common one, since the objects pursued by a Napoleon or a Hitler are easy to understand and the triumphs they achieve of a kind that most people envy.

THERE is a well-known story of a Hollywood magnate who, when his staff brought him a scenario of H. G. Wells's *Outline of History*, asked them if they couldn't work in a love interest. Much ridicule has been levelled at this excellent man. What! The ages of stone and iron and bronze, the migrations of primeval man, the first empires and their fall, the clash of contending creeds, the great trade routes, the conquest of nature, the miracles of applied science—and it misgives this cretin that the public will yawn unless he throws in a pair of lovers gazing into one another's eyes! None the less, the magnate's instinct was sound. He was on the right track, even if he had not gone very far along it. Had he developed his thought more fully he might have expressed it in some such terms as these, with what effect on his standing in Hollywood I cannot say offhand: 'Gentlemen, humanity, under which heading I include you no less than myself, is looking for something, and all this turmoil of empires and creeds and trade routes and misapplied science springs from its failure to find it. You have brought me an outline of history. But I do not want a panorama, I want a revelation. I do not want a mob, I want a man. Infinity is not in the world about us; it is in our hearts, the meeting-place and battleground of eternity and time. That is the only real conflict, and through the individual alone can its varying fortunes be expressed. Would Homer have been remembered if his theme had been the trade routes of the Eastern Mediterranean? Does David still live for us because his reign marked a certain stage in the political development of a Semitic people? Is *King Lear* a supreme masterpiece because it suggests the uneasy internal state of Britain before the Romans arrived? Or *Macbeth* because it foreshadows the increasingly important role played by England in the affairs of her northern neighbour? No, only what takes place in the heart of man, at the intersection of time and eternity, is of enduring interest. Only the experience of the individual is truth. The rest is information. We remember Homer because we also, like the old men who wondered at



the surpassing loveliness of Helen, have been lifted by the vision of beauty out of time and pain. Each of us, like David, has loved himself when he supposed he loved another, and has wept for Absalom too late. Like Lear, we have all desired power and love simultaneously, and some, like him, have turned to Cordelia in the end; others, like Macbeth, have followed their dead souls into the darkness.

‘So, gentlemen, I should be grateful if you would take this scenario away, and bring me back something relatively human, if it be but the story of a simpleton who makes good after being sacked for not knowing his job.’

This enlightened magnate would unquestionably have found in Mr. A. J. Sylvester’s recollections of Lloyd George<sup>1</sup> the raw material of the kind of scenario he was looking for. Mr. Sylvester was Lloyd George’s private secretary from 1923 till his death, and for five or six years after 1917 was in close contact with him in London and in the post-war conferences at Paris, Cannes, and Genoa. He therefore knew Lloyd George thoroughly as a human being, and it is as such that he pictures him, honestly and at the same time humbly, for his adoration of Lloyd George is clear on every page. He was hurt by Lloyd George as a Hindu is hurt when the Juggernaut car grinds over his prostrate body, but his sufferings have not bred resentment. Lloyd George was Lloyd George, just as life was life. One groaned and bowed the head.

Mr. Sylvester’s first close view of Lloyd George was in December 1915, when he attended a Cabinet meeting as a shorthand writer and caught snatches of a conversation between Lloyd George and the Prime Minister; Asquith quoting experts to support his objection to increased expenditure on munitions, Lloyd George vehement, contemptuous, and overwhelming: ‘You sent me to France to see what was wanted. I have seen for myself what the troops need. I’ve promised them they shall have what they need. More and better guns, more and better shells than the Germans, and I’m going to keep my promise to them, experts or not.’ He had reached the Promised Land at last, and only Asquith stood between him and his heritage. A year later he became Prime Minister.

As a general rule men with an inordinate appetite for power

<sup>1</sup> *The Real Lloyd George*. By A. J. Sylvester.

have been both spoilt and humiliated in their early years, the spoiling accustoming them to expect attention, and the humiliation hardening their resolve to get it. Two obvious examples are Frederick the Great and Hitler, each of whom was indulged by his mother and bullied by his father; and Hitler had also his obscure birth to resent and the fact that he was a native of a ramshackle, declining country which bordered a great and expanding empire. Unlike Hitler, Lloyd George was happy as a child, for he was pampered by his uncle and his mother and his grandmother; but as he grew older he began to realize that he was a privileged person only in his own home. A poor Welshman, he stood in much the same relation to England as the Austrian Hitler to Prussia. What affection and poetry were in his nature had their roots in Wales. England magnetized his ambition; it was a challenge to his audacity and resource, the theatre of his star performances as social reformer, pacifist and war minister. But it touched nothing in him deeper than his vanity. The scene of his power was not the scene of his affections, and so he was cut off from the secret influence which has preserved men as greedy as himself for the world's applause from degenerating into mere adventurers.

Politics to Lloyd George was a conflict of wits and wills, and he had every weapon at his disposal; an unsurpassed faculty for absorbing the relevant details, perfect self-command at the critical moment, an infallible instinct for cajoling or threatening, according to the immediate need, and, when violence was required, neither scruples nor compunctions. For many years his career was a succession of personal triumphs, but in the end he was ruined by his own virtuosity. Some kind of coherence is required in a politician, some kind of pattern must be discernible in his achievement. As a Radical, Lloyd George had championed the masses and small nations rightly struggling to be free. As something not easily distinguishable from a Tory, he had knocked Asquith and Germany out, nearly hanged the Kaiser, and flayed the hide off a small country wrongly struggling to be free. So far, so good or so bad, according to the point of view. There were numerous precedents for this kind of political development or retrogression. But when he invited the Irish gunmen to Downing Street, and a few months later was figuring at Genoa as a kind of St. Francis radiating love in a jungle of wolves and boars, the Tories had had enough; and as the Liberals had

already had far too much and Labour was not having anything at all, there was nothing for it except retirement into the leisure and well-appointed comfort of what politicians call the wilderness. In 1922 Lloyd George ceased to be Prime Minister, and, although he lived another twenty-three years, never held office again.

In the year after his retirement he went on a triumphal tour through the States and Canada, accompanied by Mr. Sylvester, who, now that Lloyd George was no longer in public life, bore the full weight of his appetite for power, in sudden changes of plan, peremptory and impossible demands, silence when Mr. Sylvester wanted to ascertain his wishes, rage when his wishes had not been divined. Yet Mr. Sylvester continued to love and adore his tyrant. 'I could not help feeling tremendously proud of my chief that night,' he writes of a speech Lloyd George delivered in New York. 'Despite the stress and strain of the last month, the number of times he had spoken, and the difficult and delicate topics with which he had dealt, not once had he made a *faux pas*. That night as he addressed the great audience he looked the picture of health.' In Toronto, as Lloyd George was walking from his car through a cheering crowd, an old woman ran forward and caught hold of his coat. Lloyd George stopped, stared at her for a moment, and held out his hand. 'Oh, sir,' she gasped, 'I only wanted to touch the hem of your coat.' He was deeply stirred, perhaps for a moment realizing the infinite irony in this confusion of himself, the medium and manipulator of mass emotion, with Christ. In general, his sense of any but mundane realities was weak even for a politician. There was nothing of the mystic in him. He once said to Mr. Sylvester: 'I feel I have no contact. I do not know which way to look to get hold of Him. I am more of a pagan. . . . Beaverbrook, on the contrary, is very religious.' What, one wonders, did he mean by pagan? What by religious? Was he classifying himself with Plato and Marcus Aurelius, and Lord Beaverbrook with St. John of the Cross and Father Damien? Or was his meaning simply that while he did not know which way to look to get hold of God, Lord Beaverbrook was strongly under the impression that God knew which way to look to get hold of him?

The last act of the drama opened in 1936 when Lloyd George paid a visit to Hitler. During his long exile from office he had

Wales. When the car was all packed up ready to leave Churt, Mr. Sylvester narrates, Lloyd George suddenly got out and went slowly back to his library for a last look at the Freedoms in their valuable caskets, the open fireplace by which he had written much of his memoirs, and the lakes and orchards and woodlands beyond the huge plate-glass window, the idea of which had been suggested to him by the window in Hitler's villa at Berchtesgaden. In his last months he spent many hours sitting in a bay window through which Criccieth was visible and the sea and the Merionethshire hills beyond. The greater war and the greater glory were distant rumours there, and once when Mr. Sylvester hurried in to him, brimming over with the latest news, he threw his arms about and ejaculated 'I don't want to hear *anything* about *anything*.'

## WINSTON CHURCHILL

PLUTARCH'S method of pairing off similar persons is plain and sensible, and jogs the reader along to instructive conclusions, but to juxtapose opposites is more stimulating to the imagination and outlines the persons concerned against a larger background.

At a party one day, Lady Oxford narrates in her memoirs, Winston Churchill was baffled when someone referred to William Blake. He appears, indeed, to have had a fleeting hope that Admiral Blake was meant; but this hope having been extinguished he shortened his line and waited for a convenient moment to advance again. It would certainly be difficult to find anything in common between William Blake and Churchill except great courage and, if one cares to stretch a point, a talent for painting. 'Nothing', wrote Blake, 'can withstand the fury of my course among the stars of God and the abysses of the Accuser.' He was more at home in heaven and in hell than in this world, the applause of whose inhabitants he would have welcomed merely as a sign that they were beginning to emerge from their spiritual torpor. Riches and position had no attraction for him; he did not cultivate the acquaintance of important people or even realize that they were important. The great events and the great figures of his age blazed for a moment in his mind as symbols of recondite transcendental truths and faded again. As mundane phenomena they did not interest him. Had he had more of earth in his composition his work would have benefited in various ways. It would have been richer and more harmonious, its illumination steadier and more prolonged; but it might have lacked the rare moments when its music makes all temporal jubilations sound like the spectral rustle of leaves in a windy night.

In a recent biography of Nugent Hicks, Bishop of Lincoln, there is a photograph of the boys in the headmaster's house at Harrow, taken when Hicks was head of the house. Hicks, composed and responsible-looking, is seated next to the

headmaster, and the other sixty or seventy boys are ranged in the usual rows, with the exception of Winston Churchill, who, his head and shoulders projecting from a window at right angles to the photographer, and his face turned towards the camera, at once catches the eye, a small boy in Eton jacket and collar, transformed by his own resource and audacity into the most conspicuous object in this impressive group. Such was his resolve not to be overlooked, even at a time when there was nothing in the outside world to feed his ebullience. In a passage which Mr. Colin Coote quotes<sup>1</sup> from *My Early Life*, Churchill wrote: 'I was happy as a child with my toys in my nursery. I have been happier every year since I became a man. But this interlude of school makes a sombre grey patch upon the chart of my journey.' He was no good at work and did not care for football or cricket. His father, whom he worshipped, thought him stupid, his brilliant and beautiful mother shone in the distance, and during the first twenty years of his life his only confidante and dearest friend was his nurse. The desire to vindicate himself in his father's eyes took deep root in these years. It was disappointed by Lord Randolph's premature death, but the desire to equal and if possible surpass his father's achievement continued to shape his life and may have been largely responsible for tilting the balance between his two great passions, politics and war, in favour of politics, until the time came when he was able to satisfy both passions simultaneously.

At the close of the first world war, if one excludes Horatio Bottomley, who for a time enjoyed a unique popularity among the millions of serving soldiers and their dependants, Winston Churchill was the most spectacular figure in public life after Lloyd George. But his fame was not solidly based. The Dardanelles campaign, the chief enterprise of his career, had failed, and people were disposed to regard its failure as symbolic, and its architect as predestined to be brilliant in conception and imperfect in execution. This judgment, however, did not extend to Churchill's writings. Here, for causes deeply imbedded in the English character, his path was made smooth before him. In this region of human endeavour the battered, dauntless fighter no longer trod on flints or thrust forward through thorny thickets. I remember a reception which, when

<sup>1</sup> *Maxims and Reflections of the Rt Hon Winston S Churchill, C.H., M.P.* Arranged and provided with an Introduction by Colin Coote, and selected by him in collaboration with Denzil Batchelor.

he had completed the first half of his *Marlborough*, his publishers gave in his honour, in the late autumn of 1935, I think. There was a dais in an upper room, and on the dais a greater throne and two lesser ones, and from the street a red carpet mounted to the dais, and at the entrance to the upper room stood liveried footmen, and there was a buffet where a hundred and fifty or so of beaming writers were getting something for nothing instead of a little for a good deal. The guest of the evening seemed in a very affable humour as he came in flanked by his two hosts, and I looked forward to his speech; but as I was dining in the outer suburbs and uncertain of my train and bus connexions, I had to leave during the chairman's introductory remarks which, opening with his love as a lad for Bunyan, seemed to be shaping towards a climax associated with the name of his guest. This was a pilgrim's progress which, in principle while doubtless waiving its personal reference, Churchill would have approved, for, as he explains in his essay on T. E. Lawrence, he regards literature as a record of action and its other aspects as of secondary value. *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gulliver's Travels*, he says in this essay, are dear to British homes. But Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* is not only their equal in interest and charm, 'it is fact, not fiction. The author was also the commander.' To Lawrence himself, in his clearer moments, literature was something else than an opportunity for self-glorification based on a more or less accurate transcript of facts, and he came in due course to realize that the *Seven Pillars* was forced, warped, and insincere, an attempt baulked by his own nature to unravel the spiritual state reflected in his Arabian experiences. In the books compared with his by Churchill, Lawrence would, or could, have seen not pleasant fancies woven at leisure but attempts which had succeeded where his had failed: in *The Pilgrim's Progress* Bunyan's own journey through inward despair and outward poverty and persecution; in *Robinson Crusoe* a reflection of what England with its prisons and pillories had been to Defoe who none the less, tough, resourceful, and infinitely adaptable, had managed to make himself snug enough on his desert island; in the *Voyage to Lilliput* the story of a giant who could neither rule nor serve among pygmies.

In his own practice Churchill has used writing not only to record action but also as a form of it. His *Marlborough* is not

so much a biography as a campaign against Macaulay. Weighty as a speech for the defence, it throws no light on the problem why with all his great qualities Marlborough has not impressed posterity as a great man. Johnson's 'From Marlborough's eyes the streams of dotage flow' may over-simplify the last stage in a brilliant life corroded by low aims, but it agrees more closely with the available evidence than 'Noble spirits yield themselves willingly to the successively failing shades which carry them to a better world or to oblivion.'

Men of action are poets in flashes, under a sudden pressure of emotion, but prudence, innate or acquired by long practice, accustoms them on most occasions to express themselves in tune with current sentiments and prejudices. Churchill's witty, humorous, and moving sayings, of which this book gives a good many examples, are or sound like *impromptus*. His formal eloquence, whether in books or speeches, is at some removes from life and does not stick in the mind, except on rare occasions, as in the speeches after the Fall of France and the still more magnificent speech on the second anniversary of his Premiership, when the disasters in the first half of 1942 were spurring on his enemies to hamstring the Leonidas who was slowly transforming a second Thermopylae into a more decisive Marathon. His whole life is in 'It fell to me in those dark days to express the sentiments and resolves of the British nation in that supreme crisis of its life. That was an honour far beyond any dreams or ambitions I had ever nursed, and it is one that cannot be taken away.'



MARX and Freud have been the two chief influences in this century, and as Marx refers everything to external causes and Freud refers everything to internal causes, one might suppose that no one would try to believe in both simultaneously. Yet so prevalent is the desire not to lag behind the fashion that the feat has been repeatedly attempted, and many merely confused minds thereby reduced to chaos.

Freud, who was nearly forty years younger than Karl Marx, opened up the depths of the individual consciousness as a retreat from the outside world, which by the first decades of this century had lost for the civilized peoples of western Europe much of the glow irradiating it a hundred years earlier in the springtime of industry and invention. At the centre of human consciousness Freud discovered lust and hatred. Had he dug still deeper he would have passed the centre and begun to work his way upwards; but he was fettered by the intense materialism of his race, by the spirit of the Old Testament, which, transformed into its opposite, produced the spirit of the New. Though his unit was the individual not the race, the nation, or the state, he would not breathe life into his unit, which remained an aggregate of conflicting impulses, with no co-ordinating soul. So, in spite of all his genius, Freud stuck fast in a no-man's-land between the Old and the New Testament, between the instinct of hostility to everything not itself and the desire to exterminate it which characterize man's nature in its primitive form, and the sense of a kinship with all life which expands in the later stages of man's development.

Marx, on the other hand, was pure Old Testament, savage and self-engrossed throughout his life, except for a few months of love and poetry in his early youth, and a patriarchal feeling for his wife and children. In his detailed, interesting, but too emphatically hostile study of Marx,<sup>1</sup> Mr. Schwarzschild does not relent to him even when, at the age of eighteen, he was filling note-books with songs dedicated to his future wife, 'my dear eternally beloved Jenny von Westphalen'. These

<sup>1</sup> *The Red Prussian The Life and Legend of Karl Marx*. By Leopold Schwarzschild.

efforts, according to Mr. Schwarzschild, show not only a lack of inspiration but a lack of rudimentary good taste. That may well be. Yet it is to Marx's credit, it is a faint gleam of something disinterested in his nature, that he had enough good taste to deplore his bad taste. There was, he eventually decided, nothing natural in his verse, everything was made out of thin air, the emotions were generalized and formless, and there were rhetorical reflections where there should have been poetic thoughts.

With nothing to say, plenty of rhetoric to say it with, and a boundless craving for power, Marx was well qualified for a political career. But he possessed also—an inheritance, Mr. Schwarzschild suggests, from his rabbinical forebears—a passion for abstract disquisition, for entombing a mouse of reality in a vast mountain of dialectic. He was therefore destined, much as he would have preferred the part later played by Lenin, to be the Rousseau of Communism, not its Robespierre, though it would be unfair to Marx, or perhaps to Rousseau, not to concede that in founding the First International and then, to save it from his rival Bakunin, wrecking it, Marx showed an aptitude for revolutionary politics quite foreign, so far as one can judge, to Rousseau's character.

Divested of its Hegelian wrappings of thesis and antithesis combining to form a higher synthesis, Marx's dialectical materialism expressed nothing more recondite than Marx's desire to exploit the spirit of the times in the interests of his own passion for power. If he could have conquered the world single-handed he would have been no more interested in the proletariat than in the middle and upper classes. But he needed a party, a chosen race, who would help him to spoil the Egyptians; and in mid-nineteenth-century Europe there was only one party for a man in Marx's position: the labouring masses on whom the privileged were trying to close the door opened by the French Revolution. In a revolution there can be only two parties, and a fight to the finish between them. Accordingly Marx wrote: 'Our own age, the bourgeois age, is distinguished by this—that it has simplified class antagonisms. More and more society is splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great and directly contraposed classes: bourgeoisie and proletariat.' To counteract the communism of love, which in his time still had its apostles and which naturally revolted Marx, who no more wanted to see

the classes reconciled in a universal brotherhood than Calvin wanted to see the damned in the heaven he had reserved for the elect, Marx reduced human beings to economically determined automata, one division of which, the proletariat, was being historically compelled to take power. This was the culmination of a process conditioned, like everything else, by material factors; for it was not the consciousness of human beings that determined their social existence, but, conversely, it was their social existence that determined their consciousness. Such was Marx's philosophy; a dream in which creatures deprived of all freedom and volition functioned according to the will of an omnipotent being, once called Jehovah and now the classless State.

The obverse of this tyrannous, bloodshot dream was the gloomy, tormented existence which Karl Marx led in the actual world. Settling in London in his early thirties, he stayed there the rest of his life, collecting material for *Das Kapital* in the British Museum, devising trouble for his fellow-Communists, Lassalle, Bakunin, and the rest, and watching the Continent for the upheaval which was to inaugurate the new age. The only colleague he never quarrelled with was Engels, who subsidized him for many years from Manchester, Engels' father, a German cotton-spinner, having established him there in a branch factory. Techow, a Prussian officer, who, becoming an ardent revolutionary, visited Marx in London, has pictured Marx in his relation to Engels and his other disciples. They were all, Techow said, far inferior to Marx, and if ever they forgot it he put them in their place with an insolence worthy of Napoleon—'Engels is the little Pomeranian, always busy, always yapping; he transacts the minor business matters by means of quarrels, lies, and insolence.' Of Marx himself Techow wrote: 'If his heart matched his intellect, if he could love as intensely as he can hate, then I would go through fire and water for him.'

During his first years in London Marx lived in two furnished rooms in Dean Street, Soho. In the sitting-room stood a big table covered with oilcloth, on which were scattered his manuscripts, books, papers, the children's toys, his wife's sewing, chipped tea-cups, dirty cutlery, lamps, an ink-pot, clay-pipes, and tobacco ash. Two of the children born to him in this home died, a third was stillborn, and then his son Edgar,

his Absalom, died at the age of nine. 'The house is desolate and orphaned since the death of the beloved child who was its life and soul,' Marx wrote to Engels. 'I cannot attempt to describe how we all miss him.' He had very little money, for Engels could not spare much from his salary, at that time a small one; and he was increasingly plagued by a complication of ailments—jaundice, inflammation of the liver, rheumatism, and boils in his face, mouth, and eyes. 'My wife cries all night, and that infuriates me,' he wrote to Engels. 'I am sorry for her. The heaviest burden falls on her, and fundamentally she is right. But you know of old that I have very little patience, and that I am even somewhat hard.' Gradually Engels's circumstances improved, in his later years Marx lived in comparative comfort, and he and his wife were fortunate enough to die before the suicides of two out of their three surviving daughters. But that was all their good fortune. While Marx lay in one room suffering from a combined attack of pleurisy and pneumonia, Frau Marx in the adjoining room, the door open between them, was dying of cancer—a dialectical matrimonialism whose thesis and antithesis had combined to form a synthesis of pain and despair prefiguring the not too distant future in which Marx's dream would be actualized on earth.

## THE COMMON MAN

THE current deification of the Common Man is rooted not in sympathy and a sense of brotherhood but in a complex of emotions, the chief of which is fear. Before the French Revolution the privileged classes did not trouble themselves about the virtues of the poor. There is no inducement to take a rosy view of the powerless. Nowadays, after a century and a half filled with every kind of change and upheaval, there are no longer, at least in the West, privileged classes, there are only privileged persons, uncertain how long their luck will last, aware that their well-being depends on the masses, who still do the dirty work of the world, and eager to keep them in good heart, if possible with flattery, if necessary with cash.

In earlier idolatries, of kings and priests and nobles, the servility of the worshippers was in some degree redeemed by the awe and admiration they felt in the presence of, as it seemed to them, superior beings. In the idolatry of the Common Man there is only the prostration of the individual spirit before the mass and weight of a collective phenomenon. No one admires a single Common Man, or wants to be one, or would be anything but chagrined if hailed as a satisfactory specimen of one. It is not surprising, therefore, that attempts to rationalize the cult of the Common Man reduce their perpetrators to the state of mental chaos in which Mr. Kenneth Richmond, after devoting a book<sup>1</sup> to celebrating the Common Man as the keystone of English poetry, cries out, while coherent speech is still possible to him: 'The idea of the Common Man. We *must* believe in it. As yet the idea is as vague, as blurred as any idea can be. Everywhere men feel it in the ferment of their blood and writhe because they feel themselves inarticulate.' It is not, unfortunately, the idea of the Common Man which makes people inarticulate; it is the reality. Mr. Richmond's agitation in this passage springs from the fact that, the course of his book having brought him down to the present day, he has suddenly become aware of the Common Man as a living person, and finds him in that aspect much less

<sup>1</sup> *Poetry and the People*. By Kenneth Richmond.

picturesque, manageable and generally congenial than as an Ancient Briton or a medieval serf.

A schoolmaster, lecturer and broadcaster, Mr. Richmond is a Merry Englander of the 1947 pattern, a William Morris Dancer brought up to date, thoroughly modern in tone yet in substantial agreement with the whole variegated body of doctrine promulgated in the last seventy or eighty years by the doleful panegyrists of a cultural and economic Eden which flourished at some period, fixed by individual taste, between the Druids and Henry VII, and then vanished for ever. The theme of his book, set forth on its jacket, is that English poetry is unpopular—does not, that is, appeal to the people—because the sources of its inspiration, originally drawn from the soil, were diverted during the Renaissance into aristocratic and academic channels, the peasant tradition, though driven underground, nevertheless surviving in the work of such men as Burns, Hogg, and Clare, and in folk-song. For a champion of communal art, uncorrupted by the exhibitionism of gifted individuals, the Ancient Britons must necessarily have a strong attraction, and it is accordingly with them that Mr. Richmond leads off. 'Every hamlet', he writes, 'was a living group, consisting of nine tyddyns, each with its own smith, its own baker, and, be it noted, its own song-maker. In those druidical times it seems that men did not live by bread alone.' During the Anglo-Saxon period foreign influences, Mr. Richmond notes with regret, were already creeping in; among them, incidentally, the Faith, severance from which at the Reformation he later deplotes. But on the whole the society of those days was elevated by what he calls 'a hoary sublimity bred of vast ignorance'. Poetry was a communal affair, an entertainment as necessary at a feasting as the roast venison or bull-horn beer. There were indeed scopps (minstrels), but if I have correctly followed Mr. Richmond's reconstruction of an Anglo-Saxon feast their business was merely to start the singing, after which one man, one scop, was the order of the day. In this 'commonalty of spontaneous utterance', Mr. Richmond exultantly affirms, nothing that even the meanest intellect could fail to appreciate was uttered; for the Saxon's poetry was 'intended to be bolted whole, with relish, nor was it ashamed of an occasional belch now and then to help it along'.

After the Norman Conquest French and other influences

began to weaken 'this habit of communal authorship'. The peasant indeed remained the same, and took over 'the trusteeship of the English tradition', but the great days of 'poetry as a social attribute' were past. There was still belching on the village green, but 'with Chaucer we never quite get away from the comfortable courtier', and by the close of the fifteenth century the main stream of our national poetry had vanished underground. 'After 1500 we shall find its course more subterranean than ever, divided and diverted into lessening channels, losing itself, surfacing only at intervals.' Shakespeare, it seems, came to the surface quite often. Mr. Richmond passes his lyrics as genuine products of the soil, and manages to find some justification even for his plays, in spite of the fact that the Anglo-Saxons were indifferent to drama. 'The scop declaiming must have had some sense of situation, but generally speaking it is fair to say that histrionics were no part of the metabolism of the ordinary pre-Conquest man in this island.' There was, however, no surfacing in the other poets of the English Renaissance, whom Mr. Richmond compares with the dog in the fable. Instead, he says, of going back to Nature they pursued the idea of a celestial Beauty, dropping the bone for the shadow.

Skimming rapidly over the Augustans Mr. Richmond comes to the poets of the imaginative renaissance towards the close of the eighteenth century, and deals with them as follows: 'Blake did a disappearing trick, vanishing into mysticism. Keats swooned. Coleridge got lost in his own fuddled "counterfeit infinity". The seraph Shelley, most ineffectual of angels, was taken up into a cloud.' There still remain Wordsworth and Burns to be disposed of, the most sublime of poets and one of the most ardent. By ignoring what is individual and inspired in them, Mr. Richmond turns them into a pair of clodhoppers excellently suited to his purpose. 'It was the others, the plodders, who came nearer to making the return. The Crabbes, the Burns, the Wordsworths, the Clares; the dull fellows rather than the shining faces.' In them, he says, the characteristics of the forgotten peasant reappeared, the heaviness, the simplicity of motive, the constancy and seriousness of purpose, the durability. 'They trudged rather than soared.'

Beneath the smug silliness which pervades this lamentable

manifesto there is a confused self-distaste which reveals itself from time to time in such phrases as 'Our lily-livered twentieth-century mentalities'. Mr. Richmond's glorification of the peasant, his nostalgia for the slow rhythm of an Ancient Briton's mental processes, his yearning towards the hoary sublimity of our Saxon forebears, bred of vast ignorance and expressed in communal belchings, are all symptoms of the revulsion from self-development which, whenever mankind has reached a certain stage of civilization, drags it back towards the primal darkness from which it was beginning to emerge. It is this revulsion which we are experiencing to-day and which is enforcing once again what ought by this time to be the self-evident truth that the Common Man, half brute, half god, is all brute so long as he remains in the herd. Christ, who appealed to the individual, teaching that the way which leads to life is narrow, and that few find it, was rejected by the villages of Galilee. Hitler, supported in his appeal to the mob by such specimens of the natural man as the peasant Julius Streicher and the peasant Dr. Ley, was followed by millions.

Life exists on different levels of consciousness, and the journey from the lowest to the highest level must be undertaken alone. The state of being symbolized in 'when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy' is far distant from us in this life, and the herd bellowing on the plain below may send up a warming and comforting sound to the climber tiring on the first slopes of the long ascent. But the communion of scops is not the communion of saints, and if the climber turns back let him at least retain his sense of the distinction between them.